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‘The Country in Our Minds’: Diasporic Longing, Ethnic Solidarity and Political
Consciousness within the Haitian Transnational Community

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Sociology

by

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Consciousness within the Haitian Transnational Community

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by

Jamella Nefetari Gow

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ABSTRACT

‘The Country in Our Minds’: Diasporic Longing, Ethnic Solidarity and Political Consciousness within the Haitian Transnational Community

by

Jamella Nefetari Gow

This study examines the lived realities of Haitian Americans residing in Miami, Florida. By drawing on theories of global capitalism, migration, transnationalism, and diaspora it explores how the experience of Haitian migrants living in the Miami community of Little Haiti offer insights as to whether transnational, diasporic communities are uniquely placed to become socially aware and political active within their diasporic communities . Most studies on Haitians in the United States focus on New York. However, those residing in the global city of Miami are a unique population of mostly working-class Haitians who, marginalized by U.S. politicians, the media, and migrant groups in Florida, are rendered precarious. Such experiences can push Haitian migrants to maintain transnational links and form diasporic communities in areas such as the ethnic enclave of Little Haiti.

Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with Haitian volunteers and employees at the Little Haiti Community Support Center (LHCSC), in July 2014 I explored the lived experiences of politically engaged Haitian migrants residing in this diasporic community. From the interviews emerged a hybrid, at times ambivalent, diasporic

political and cultural consciousness maintained through transnational forms of solidarity.

Political consciousness developed in community and in strategic collaborations with other Black diasporic groups. Cultural consciousness functioned as a tool of empowerment and a medium for critiques of U.S. policies, aspects of Haitian culture, and gender norms.

Activism solidified communities and families and cultivated new practices to pass on to the next generation. Using the LHCSC as an example of a transnational, politically active site of community, this paper explores how an ethnic community becomes unified as diaspora, and more socially and globally aware as a consequence of their migrant experience.

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INTRODUCTION

“Cultural identities are...not an essence but a *positioning*”
Hall, 1990:226

This thesis provides case studies of eight Haitian American migrants who live near to, and work in a community center in Little Haiti, Miami, Florida. By taking an ethnographic look at their volunteer work at the center and talking with them about how they see themselves as part of a community, I seek to answer a number of questions:

1. How is the experience of diaspora understood and lived by Haitian migrants in the United States and, in particular, Miami, Florida?
2. Do they see their work with fellow Haitians and family members abroad as contributing to a transnational identity?
3. How does political activism contribute to the reinforcement of this transnational or diasporic identity?
4. What are the implications for future research on transnational migrant groups in terms of how political awareness and cultural solidarity emerge through the creation of diaspora?

In the following pages, this thesis provides an overview of the literature on migration and global capitalism and uses Haiti as an example of how colonial pasts and neo-colonial policies in the present create the conditions for diaspora in the 21st century.

Neoliberalism and global capitalism are used to contextualize current migration and the growing importance of maintaining transnational connections between migrants in primarily First World or core countries and periphery countries where migrants' family members receive financial support through remittances and their communities see development through the emergence of hometown associations. This discussion emphasizes

the neocolonial structures which shape migration in the Caribbean. However, from these structures emerge global connections not only through transnational financial links but also “transnational communities” (Levitt 2001) which can transform migrants’ home community and place of residence into globalized sites where community and new cultures are created.

Connecting cultural production with studies of global structures of power is important for highlighting the experience of migrants, who are not only globalized labor but also transnational citizens. While transnational studies focus primarily on the role of material connections and routes migrants make between their homelands and eventual country of residence, works on diaspora examine constructions of cultural and national consciousness amongst communities primarily outside the nation state. For those transnational migrants who simultaneously see themselves as part of a diaspora, hybrid forms of identity and culture often emerge, and migrants develop unique forms of political and cultural consciousness that can, and do, provide a social critique of both home and countries of residence.

Haitian migrants, whose colonial history is unique as one of the first republics in the Western Hemisphere as a result of its successful slave revolt (1791-1804), are important for exploring these phenomena since they hold on to this history of revolution as a form of cultural identity and a motivation for political awareness even as they become migrants and form part of the Haitian diaspora. This thesis delves into the personal stories of four men and four women who envision themselves as living in a diaspora community, embodying transnational identity, and straddling Haitian and American identity in ways that reinforce their own cultures of political activism. In this study I discuss themes of diasporic solidarity in the community and within the Black diaspora. From the interviews I note that social

activism develops as a preserver of communities, families, and future generations. The thesis then concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings and the possibilities for further work.

“Exploring Little Haiti: a Community within a Global City”¹

Heading south
down Biscayne Boulevard
in Miami-Dade County,



you begin to see where the joints connecting city to city, borough to borough, have porous edges. Miami-Dade county and its more famous city of Miami is a large geographically and culturally diverse area filled with Latin American, Caribbean, Pan-Asian, African and other ethnic influences in the form of restaurants, boutiques, markets, festivals, ethnic neighborhoods, and the like. In this area, one is certain to find a plate of food, a piece of clothing, or a decorative item that reminds the many migrants who live there of “back home.” This city is cut by I-95, a congested highway which serves commuters and vacationers heading downtown or to the Keys, and, more locally, by Biscayne Boulevard which is one the arteries from which many of Miami-Dade County’s little cities spread out and flourish. Starting from the top of Miami at North Miami Beach, you continue south on Biscayne towards Miami the city and begin to see how the arrays of cultures focus onto specific areas.

The tops of skyscrapers flanking the Atlantic Ocean serve as a guide. As long as you can see their peaks to your left, you are going south along the coast. As you drive down Biscayne, you pass by strip malls and larger, typical commercial buildings such as a Target here, a Starbucks there. Tourist stops and gift shops appear by the dozen offering sunglasses, beachwear, and either boat or yacht rentals. Traffic is heavy because of the numerous businesses, and the four lanes going each way barely contain the impatient commuters, the

¹ All photographs taken by author.

aggressive drivers, and the cruisers in their Lamborghinis and other foreign cars flaunting Miami money. At the intersection of Biscayne and State Road 922, the four lanes split off to become three then two lanes as the rich and famous turn left to drive over the intercostal causeway to Bal Harbor, a rich haven on the beachside of Miami complete with valet-only shopping malls, high rise hotels, and the occasional opportunity to see a celebrity local.



However, we continue south down Biscayne where the scenery begins to quickly change.

The traffic is still congested, but now we see both young and old walking on sidewalks and street medians, waiting for buses, and quickly

crossing four lanes of traffic whenever there is a clearing. Ubiquitous blue and white Miami Mini-Buses, a Haitian-owned company, are always ready at hand to pick up residents who need a ride to get home or to run errands (Zéphir 2004:99). Now, instead of tourist stops, there are more local, specialty businesses. Ethnic grocery stores, car and boat repair, and storefronts with small goods cluster in plazas or stand alone on the edges of Biscayne advertising to both walkers and drivers alike. Some of these businesses market their services with colorful murals on the side of office buildings and other spaces. Side streets lead to upper- and lower-class neighborhoods as well as ethnic enclaves: Biscayne Park, Pinewood, Miami Shores, West Little River, and El Portal. Liberty City, a historically Black American community, lies further west on the other side of the 95 highway. This highway serves as a border between Liberty City and Little Haiti.

Around 82nd street, Little Haiti or Little River or Lemon City--it has been called many names--begins between the borders of El Portal, the quickly growing Design

District, and Miami, the bustling city of millions. Little Haiti's boundaries are amorphous, and are constantly being contested. The neighborhood has a reputation of crime and poverty, so big developers wish to come in and gentrify the neighborhood. With this



change, some argue businesses desire to erase the name "Little Haiti" and restore its older historic name "Lemon City." Lemon City is important to some for its history as an agricultural center in Miami and its early buildings such as the Lemon City School, Miami's first school (Green and Rabin 2013). Haitians who live in the community or who are familiar with the area have mixed opinions of these proposed changes. Some admit that the place has a bad reputation, but still claim it as home. One interviewee said:

I think when you go to Little Haiti...you think about drugs, you think about getting killed, getting robbed, because that's the, because I guess that's the, what's been, that's the name for it, that's the face. Now I'm not saying that's what it is, I mean I've never been robbed, I mean I worked there for many years and I never I mean, I felt at home. But that's the face. (Jean: 2)

Others point to how developers see Little Haiti only as valuable land to expand Miami and other surrounding neighborhoods. As one community leader says:

In the past, Little Haiti started from 36th street all the way to 82nd and the East side Biscayne Boulevard all the way to Northwest 5th avenue you know, but slowly but surely the area has become a hot potato economy--they call it--because downtown is very congested...they are trying to get to get a big chomp and big piece of little Haiti, you know, because if you read the news, down here and on Biscayne Pines,

there are a lot of competition. Basically they are trying to buy properties and houses, you know, in order to push forward. (Frantz: 3)

This debate over the fate of Little Haiti is important to its residents as the neighborhood represents a cultural center and first stop for many who identify as part of the Haitian diaspora. Thus, its future has become a source of debate and motivation for political activism for many Haitians.

The history of Haitians coming to South Florida is well established since Haitians having been migrating or more, famously, coming by boat to Florida's shores. Indeed, from 1971 to 1980, 35,000 to 45,000 Haitians came by boat to Florida to escape political violence in Haiti (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 1994). The number of Haitians coming to Florida is immense and has been rapidly increasing. According to Zéphir, "Florida with 267,689 Haitian immigrants now appears to have the largest number of the legal and illegal population as it is the destination of the desperate boat people" (2004: 74). The term "boat people" and its accompanying image of Haitians coming to Florida in rickety boats during the '80s and '90s has become the typical media representation of Haitians even though Haitians have been migrating to the United States since the early history of the U.S. (Laguerre 1998). This particular wave of Haitian migration is distinct because, unlike previous migratory waves of upper- and middle-class Haitians who moved primarily to New York, many of the migrants who fled to Florida belonged to Haiti's larger, rural, lower-class. While the oldest settlement of Haitians live in New York, Miami's Haitian migrant population has become a new spot to settle not only for recent migrants but also established Haitians in the northeast who are drawn to Miami for its similarity to Haitian weather and Haitian local culture.

Since then, Little Haiti has been known as a first stop for Haitian migrants coming to Florida before they or their descendants move on to the surrounding cities. According to one interviewee, Haitian migrants live on a continuum, sometimes spanning generations, starting out in Little Haiti before moving on to other parts of Florida. As one interviewee put it:

“I think there’s a transition for most Haitians. Most Haitians start out in Little Haiti and then they move to North Miami and then like Pembroke Pines and Miramar, stuff like that. So yeah, I also still have family [in Little Haiti], my Grandma lives in little Haiti” (Nadia: 1).

Indeed, as you enter the neighborhood of Little Haiti from Biscayne down 82nd, you can immediately see why many fresh Haitian migrants would call this place home.

As you take 82nd street more inland, you see colorful houses and clustered apartment buildings in the surrounding streets. This road is then split by one of Little



Haiti’s main roads, 2nd avenue, which has been renamed Félix Morisseau-Leroy Avenue in honor of the famous Haitian poet. 2nd Avenue leads you into the center of Little Haiti, a community of Haitian migrants and families. Buildings’ signs switch between English, French, and Haitian Creole. Traffic is quieter and more people sit on porch steps to chat with one another or walk to local businesses. A woman sells tropical fruits such as sugar cane, coconut, and mango from a small stand set up on the side of the road.

Just off 2nd Avenue on 62nd, the Notre Dame d’Haiti Mission is a source of pride for the community. The church is considered a cultural symbol, and, according to a resident,

a communal triumph. According to the same resident, the parish has three or four thousand members and was built by money raised by the parishioners themselves. He says: “the community...put their little pennies together...and finally...they got, after several meetings and fundraisers, they managed to get three million dollars to build that church!” (Frantz: 4-5). The church building met some resistance from outside developers who want to restore Little Haiti’s history before migrants moved in. However, the church is alive and well, and stands as a monument to the Haitian community there along with a statue of Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution, on the same street.

Further down 2nd avenue are a series of plazas cluster together with buildings painted in blue in red, the colors of the Haitian flag. Tiny shops offer calling cards, quick loans, money transfers, and airline tickets to Haiti. One building has a mural on the side of the wall marking various cities in Haiti where one can travel through their travel agency.

The Caribbean Market, a valued landmark, stands out on the corner of 2nd avenue with its bright yellow walls, and red, green, blue, and orange decorative trim. It is topped by pointed roofs adorned with



intricate lattices. Part of a larger plaza of Haitian businesses and community buildings, it is currently being restored and reopened because of its centrality within the community and because of its “kind of Haitian identity,” according to one resident (Frantz: 4).

Hinting at the current political relationship between Haiti and the United States, a tall sign stands in front of the construction which proclaims that the renovations are “your homeland



defense/neighborhood improvement bond dollars at work.” The sign’s connection of the local Haitian neighborhood to the United States Homeland Defense is troubling and blatantly reflects the kind of colonial relationship the U.S. has with Haiti.

Indeed, Haiti was first occupied by the United States from 1915 to 1934, a period of 19 years. During that time, United States forces exploited peasant labor and set up a local military which became the precursor for Haiti’s violent and oppressive military force. President-for-life François Duvalier’s Tontons Macoutes are the more widely known child of such military development. By recruiting from all classes and communities, François Duvalier was able to terrorize and coerce Haitian citizens at the local level at all times. The Haitian military became a powerful force in its own right, and Haiti has been periodically destabilized by military overthrows and coups during political transitions throughout its history.

The United States has occupied Haiti two more times in 1994, and 2004. Even now, the United States and the controversial involvement of the United Nations have caused tensions in Haiti and served to drain the economy. According to Hallward (2010), this has contributed not to the improvement but continual instability of Haiti as a nation. The seemingly innocent placement of a construction sign in Little Haiti attributed to the

Department of Homeland Security thus becomes an ironic yet somber reminder of Haiti's close history with the United States.

However, in the same plaza behind the Caribbean marketplace is the Little Haiti Cultural Center. Built in 2009, it is a new building filled with spaces for groups to rent out and have meetings, performances, and activities for the youth. Outside and behind the building is a courtyard where you can usually see young adults directing children



in organized games with a boom-box playing. The courtyard is framed by a beautiful mural depicting a bustling street market with vendors shouting, a woman dancing in colorful blue and red regalia, men playing instruments, and people enjoying the beautifully riotous scene.² A sculpture made up of twin circles, blue and red, the colors of the Haitian flag, stands on the opposite side of the courtyard.

Within the Caribbean Marketplace plaza, there is also a local bookstore owned by a leader in the community. The bookstore not only sells books but also functions as a museum, gathering place, performance theatre, study room, and small convenience store for people in the local community. The building is pink and looks small from the outside, but it contains an upstairs, back room, office space, and indoor and outdoor lounges for community members, visitors, and even reporters who come to hear from the owner about the vibe of the community and the culture. The store contains books in English, French, and Creole, and their contents cover the history of Haiti, Haitian religions such as Voodoo, and books by local



² For photograph of mural, see first image at beginning of this vignette.

Haitian authors. One can stop by to look at the books or go upstairs where there are Haitian artifacts, memorabilia, portraits of Haitian leaders past and present, photographs of events in Haiti and Little Haiti, Haitian national flags, and signatures of famous Haitians who have visited the store. People come in regularly to buy books, lottery tickets, Haitian candies, and sometimes just to chat with the owner or other customers.

Other stores in the plaza include a beauty salon, tax center, and convenience store, and they are painted in brightly colored blue and yellow. Across the street lie more stores, including an African and Haitian movie center with murals of famous actors from Haiti and parts of Africa painted on the outside wall. A green plaza with a yellow lattice further down 2nd Avenue contains more stores. Homes sit behind these shopping centers and trees with tropical fruit such as mango and banana overhang. Little Haiti has colorfully painted buildings, detailed murals, and even tributes to Haiti's heroic history with an intersecting street renamed Toussaint L'Ouverture Boulevard.

However, one of the many sites which hold this community together is a seemingly quiet white building within the neighborhood which holds the Little Haiti Community Support Center, or, LHCSC. The LHCSC is a first stop for Haitians coming into Florida to settle and a public services hub not only for the Haitian community but beyond. Because of its diversity of migrant clients, it has been called "a little United Nations" (Sandra: 3). It is a first stop for many Haitians arriving in Florida. As one interviewee who supports and does service for the LHCSC says: "As Haitians, it is like, you must know [it]" (Jean: 3). For Haitians and other migrants, the LHCSC is a community center, classroom, social services and resource center all rolled into one.

The building sits next to a plaza with a few commercial stores. A loud radio plays on the front step of a store nearby, and you can hear everything from music to sermons in Creole. The center lies on a busy two lane street typically filled with cars, people walking to and fro, and wandering chickens and roosters who can be heard sometimes throughout the day. The organization itself looks large from the outside as it is a two story building. It has a small sign, so one could just miss it, but there are always people coming in and out. A large gate covers the door, but the door always opens around 9 a.m.

When you come inside, you see that this space is large with multiple offices. The walls are mostly bare except for a space with children's art and some posters for events in the community. Walking down the halls, you hear the squeals of children and music as well as the quiet chatter of adults catching up with one another or calling out greetings. The area has a daycare and after-school program, so you can always hear the children running through the halls, engaging in activities, and calling to each other. Towards the end of the day, children coming from school begin to mill into a large classroom and bring their backpacks. Throughout the day, however, parents, older Haitians, and others head to the waiting room to get their needs met. The waiting room is the first stop for migrants to come and find the resources they need. Whenever a new wave of migrants comes in, the LHCSC is one of the first to know about it. They immediately mobilize and address their needs. Lastly, four days a week, the large adult classroom slowly fills with "English as a Second Language" students carrying notebooks and handouts from the day before. Students come in faithfully to learn conversational English, financial responsibility, and how to access a computer. Classes are taught by staff and volunteers.

During the summer, college interns come during the day to help draft local news reports for media outlets and coordinate media appearances for the founder and staff. They also work on creating petitions that advocate for more migrant rights. During my time there, the main project was working on a petition to alter the policy on family reunification. This is one of many projects that staff and interns at the LHCSC work on throughout the year. Many of the people who work for or support the LHCSC participate in rallies and meet with local and national political leaders about issues dealing with Haiti and migrant policies. Indeed, Sandra, the founder is known nationally and internationally for her advocacy. She recently came back from an international conference abroad to advocate on behalf of migrant families.

The LHCSC has numerous offices that serve clients with resources on finding housing, starting a business, navigating immigration forms and policies, as well as family intervention, public health, and networking with other Haitians just by simply being there. The waiting room serves as one space for community building for adults. The wait to see the secretary who processes clients can take hours, so many of the new clients sit in the small waiting room's assorted couches and chairs and talk with one another in Creole. The space is very friendly. Typically, when a person comes into the waiting room, those waiting will greet the newcomer in unison with a friendly bonjour, and the person will respond back in kind. Quiet people, both young and old, will suddenly jump into conversations that had been going back and forth across the room. Some debates became heated but everyone is allowed input, and everyone seems to have a shared understanding of not only the topics brought up but the mood of the waiting room.

The secretary at the desk is always multi-tasking by answering the phone, doing intake for clients, conversing with staff, and filling out paperwork. Many people know the secretary well, and the other staff who would periodically walk through the waiting room to complete multiple tasks. Sandra, a woman who is always busy advocating for the Haitian community, and in particular, women and families, is admired by those clients who come in regularly. She is always greeted enthusiastically. In return, she always greets everyone and even exchanges words with some of the people, affectionately laying hands on shoulders as she chats. Although new people come in to the LHCSC every day, they immediately find ways to become part of the larger family of Haitians and other migrants who see this place as a community.

The LHCSC is staffed by a variety of people who take on multiple tasks. A person who specializes in advocacy may also be in charge of childcare or a pro bono lawyer may also teach English. Indeed, the head of the organization admitted that they were short-staffed and always busy taking in clients and advocating for the larger community through media appearances and challenging public policy.

Because their services are funded through outside organizations, a large variety of people come to rely on their services which are free to them. The LHCSC, originally focused on Haitian women and their families, actively engages with the surrounding communities in order to make sure that all have access to their services. This has been a part of their entire history. As Sandra stated in an interview:

for the first nine years we were completely volunteer organization and then we spent most of this time, educating, learning, and sharing and understanding the different institutions and then bringing these people to the community, let them understand,

making presentations, and at the same time going to where the Haitians are...So, it's been fourteen years now since we've transitioned. We started seeing, and that's because the result of our success, great success, other people, like the court system referring not only Haitians but non-Haitians to us. So that's how now we are servicing people who, you know, speak Spanish, African Americans, other immigrant groups from Africa, to the point that the [LHCSC] is a misnomer...So the focus, initial focus for it, was to provide services to Haitians but now we are like a little United Nations! We provide services for all. (Sandra: 3)

The LHCSC, then, is a community organization not only for one community, but for many. This perspective of serving all kinds of communities was a common one amongst most interviewees. Many saw their mission in life to not only help the Haitian community and bring its needs to the public attention but also to remain global in outreach and finding similarities in their plight to those of other ethnic groups.

The LHCSC is not only a provider of services but it also serves as a way to galvanize the community into political action. As Sandra states:

my philosophy has always been not to really give, you know, provide, but most importantly, to really give the tools, to provide the tools for families so that they can contribute to their own empowerment and transformation and this is why in Miami we are unique in the sense that we provide quality services but we also get the clients engaged. We organize them locally, state-wide, and nationally to make sure that they can have, not only that they strengthen their voices, but that their voices are being heard. (Sandra: 2)

The LHCSC, then, is also a political force. According to the founder, their clients become politically informed and more socially aware. Many become active in the community and, according to Simon, an employee, some of his clients even return to work at this organization. According to him, former clients had formed an action group that promotes Haitian community and culture. They had also returned to support the LHCSC.

Miami and its community, Little Haiti, then is an important space for looking not only at how migrants foster cultural communities, but also as a site of developing, political transnationalism. In particular, the LHCSC, a community resource center for new migrants, serves as a gateway for migrants to settle into their new lives and also gain a sense of empowerment. This empowerment translates into social activism for residents whose lives, already racked by social inequality at home, come to the United States to find even more challenges in their community. Rather than rest, these migrants draw on their history of social engagement and in turn advocate for themselves politically and for others, socially through volunteering and supporting not only their fellow Haitians but also other marginalized communities with similar issues. As Sandra stated: “We empower our people to understand their reality...they know that it is up to them to organize and bring about change in the policies” (p. 5).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

Haiti and its migrant, diasporic population provides an example of the impact of global forces on the country of origin and on the ways that its citizens have defined themselves in response to such marginalization. Haitians abroad, in particular in the United States, point to ways they see themselves and their transnational practices as a way of “practicing Haitian-ness” and their citizenship as well as creating a space for supporting their communities and those within the larger Black diaspora. Locating Haitian migration to the United States within the larger backdrop of global capitalism, transnationalism, and the particularity of gender, allows for a critique of how neocolonialism in the guise of neoliberalism has made migration more of a necessity. This overview of the literature emphasizes these contexts in order to uncover how Haitian communities of diaspora, through their awareness of these patterns of neocolonialism, use transnational practices as a way to maintain their cultural links and, at the same time, to critique their own treatment and that of their compatriots in the home country.

Harvey (1989) argues that flexible accumulation is a characteristic of the current stage of neoliberal capitalism and that this accumulation renders individuals, specifically in the peripheral countries, even more vulnerable to exploitation. Seeing their chances for meaningful employment at home shrink, they often find themselves having to migrate to other nations in search of better opportunities. This movement, coupled with the moving of peoples from nation-states whose governments increasingly make economic, political, and physical life difficult for their citizens, has resulted in the creation of a global diaspora which relies on transnationalism to negotiate their continual movement across borders while

remaining tied to family and cultural identity of their country of origin. Along with increasing migration, in part as a result of the creation of dual labor markets which requires vulnerable laborers for exploitation, has come a tightening of borders and increasing xenophobia which serves to create and sustain their vulnerability.

Such complex notions of inclusion and exclusion or “differential inclusion” (Andrijasevic 2009) make some migrant populations more likely not only to maintain typical transnational practices such as sending remittances, but also lead them see themselves as part of political diasporas. In other words, cultural and political practices which not only raise awareness of marginalized ethnic groups in the receiving country and help to build-up community collectives and housing associations can offer marginalized migrant populations a renewed sense of cultural identity in locations that can appear hostile and welcoming simultaneously: where they are welcomed for their labor and excluded for their racial, linguistic, and cultural Otherness. Cultural consciousness becomes solidified as marginalized communities rally together as part of a unique diaspora while transnational connections reinforce these connections and help maintain that cultural distinctiveness. It is evident that awareness of collective marginality, derived from cultural affinities that reinforce the community, entails a more activist stance.

In Miami, where labor is competitive and typically determined by affiliations with certain ethnic networks having an active diasporic identity creates new forms of solidarity. In this sense, Miami can indeed be seen as a microcosm of what will increasingly become a globally stratified world. Harrison’s (2008) “global apartheid” and Quijano’s (2000) “coloniality of power” place such processes of globalization within a larger historical context of colonialism and reflect the present global migration where there is an increasing

vulnerability and push for a more mobile workforce displaced by neoliberal policies either from within the state. Thus, it is the Haitian migrants, who claim their history of resistance of colonial powers at the nation's inception, who provide a strong example of the ways culture and politics can merge as their transnational practices become forms of resistance at the same time as they help sustain communities of diaspora.

2. Global Capital and Migration

Contrary to some accounts, globalization entails not only the movement of ideas, media, and culture but also the movement of capital, goods and people, who choose or are pushed to migrate. The restructuring of global capital has created temporary, flexible labor pools drawn from nations where local leaders gain entry into a transnational capitalist class, while those without enough state or financial power struggle to survive by depending on their family's migrant labor in lieu of state support (Harvey 1989; Massey et.al. 1993; Robinson 2014). Indeed, the decision to move and become part of a diaspora has as much to do with personal choice as it does with local circumstances which make the homeland untenable for families living with the residual effects of the history of imperialism and its reappearance in neoliberalism.³ People make a decision to migrate and create transnational connections for a variety of reasons; however, to understand these individual choices it is necessary to locate them more broadly within the context of structures of power, and in particular global inequality (Robinson 2014). Doing so allows for a more critical analysis of the ways people both move and are moved either out of economic or political necessity.

³ The literature on imperialism, neoliberalism and their connections to globalized labor today is vast. A few examples include Galeano ([1973] 1997) (who makes these connections regarding Latin America in the 1970s), Harvey ([2005] 2007), Klein (2007), and Robinson (2015) who provide multiple perspectives on this topic.

Marx⁴ argues that “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere” ([1848] 1978: 476). Indeed, as capitalism reaches into newer markets across the globe, capital becomes global and so does the pool of labor. Castles and Miller (2009) argue that this globalized migrant work force, kept at the margins of national belonging, citizenship, and the rights that come along with citizenship, becomes a reserve army of labor that remains both readily available and expendable according to the needs of capital. Immigrant workers then become an integral part in the increasingly globalized economy since they constitute a new exploitable form of labor, which can move and be moved based on the needs of capital and their sites of production across the world (Castles and Miller 2009).

In the global economy, migrants represent a new globalized proletariat work force. Transnationalism then emerges as a way to rebuild connections to nations and families that members of the transnational workforce leave behind. However, as migrants settle into their countries abroad and relations with their home countries change, some migrants may develop a feeling of belonging neither here nor there, and end up living with a hybrid sense of identity. Thus, migrants may claim transnational and even diasporic identities that then shape how they view nationhood, the globalized world, their place in it and their politicization.

⁴ Marx ([1848]1978) provides a way of understanding the globalizing world as one that revolves around labor and the exploitation of that labor for profit. As Marx argues, the history of the world is shaped by a historical material progression involving class struggle between what is in the modern industrialist capitalist era the proletariat and bourgeoisie (Marx [1848]1978). Proletariat workers labor for the bourgeoisie capitalist to generate surplus value through the production of products to be sold for profit. Thus, the relationship between proletariat and bourgeoisie is one of exchange and in particular, exploitation of labor.

Wallerstein's (2000) World Systems theory,⁵ with its categories of core, periphery and semi-periphery nation states, offers a possible starting point here, with the periphery areas being of particular interest. Periphery countries include developing countries whose citizens migrate to core and semi-peripheral countries to find jobs, motivated by poverty and less state support. Much of this labor flow is induced by previous colonization by the core country or by the creation of relations of dependency of periphery and semi-periphery countries on core countries. Ultimately, it is enterprising capitalists who seek out "land, raw materials, labor, and new consumer markets" in peripheral countries (Massey et al. 1993: 445). It is this set of processes that creates global labor pools made up of migrants from, primarily, the periphery, who migrate, primarily, to the core.

Building on this argument, but also moving away from it, Robinson (2014) offers a model that is characterized by a Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) made up of the elites of the various countries. He argues that the TCC relies on the manipulation and framing of national rhetoric to achieve its goals. Robinson's reframing of the capitalist class⁶ as transnational historicizes it and reemphasizes the state as a key part of capitalism, with the nation functioning as an ideological guise to justify the state's control over the citizens. Such a reconfiguring of the nation and state allows Robinson to point to the ways it has been used to justify exclusionary practices, regulation of migration, and social policies, which serve to benefit not the citizens of a state but the TCC.

⁵ Wallerstein (2000) conceptualized the nature of this relation through the theory of world systems which takes the nation-state as the unit of analysis and argues that the structure of the world market has historically created sending and receiving countries. He sees capitalism as not a recent phenomenon but as having emerged in the 16th century and thus understands colonialism as part of it. According to Wallerstein the global system can be divided into core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries. Core countries are the centers of commerce and global cities where migrants come to work. Semi-periphery countries are a middle ground which serves as a sort of buffer between core and periphery countries.

⁶ While one can argue that the class system has developed such that there are multiple classes within the underlying binary of proletariat and bourgeoisie, here, following Robinson, I emphasize this particular one.

This particular form of globalization involves a shift from what David Harvey refers to as Fordism (1945-1973) to what political economists have termed neoliberalism, and which Harvey considers to be characterized by *flexible accumulation*. Such a shift has implications for economic value and migration since, as Harvey argues, the process entails: “the apparent move away from regular employment towards increasing reliance upon part-time, temporary or sub-contracted work arrangements” (Harvey 1989:150). According to Harvey ([2005] 2007: 64-5), the state becomes reconfigured as a stripped down structure that allows for increased privatization, and more open trade on the global scale. Neoliberal economics became a part of governmental policies under both the Reagan and Thatcher eras (Harvey [2005] 2007: 22). This shift in the Western world also entailed a similar, more coercive, shift on a global scale. In the non-Western periphery, the shift to neoliberal economies has come in the form of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that were a prerequisite for loans and financial aid from such global financial organizations as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. For example, according to Gros (2008), after the overthrow of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986, Haiti experienced structural adjustment policies which contributed to Haiti’s current dependency on foreign food imports for a significant part of its sustenance.

In the 1980s, countries in the Caribbean experienced an economic downturn when global agricultural trade fluctuated. The Caribbean nations, represented as the Caribbean Common Market or, CARICOM, were offered loans by the IMF to adjust to this impact. Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago each received loan packages that required the structural adjustment of their economies. Elu details the typical requirements for such adjustments as follows:

Some of the tenets of SAP include national currency devaluation, full trade liberalization, contractionary fiscal policy, market-determined exchange rate, and removal of all excise taxes. Using the neoclassical model as a point of reference, the market mechanism is supposed to ensure efficiency in resource allocation and promote growth with no disequilibrium or imbalances in the economy. (2000: 202-203)

However, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, such programs have, according to Elu, not pulled these countries out of debt, but have made them more dependent on foreign markets and trade. Remittances from migrant family members who work and live abroad serve to mitigate the effects of SAPs on families. In this way, structural adjustment programs have deleterious effects on peripheral countries and create mass migration, and growth of the informal economy.

This has been the case with many countries of the Caribbean, including Haiti. The transition to Jean Claude Duvalier's government (1971-1986) initially prompted foreign aid to Haiti with the leader's claims that he would be a more humane leader than his father François Duvalier during his regime (1957-1971). In the mid-1980s, this aid then came in the form of structural adjustment. Initial aid was provided on the condition of "minimal taxes, a virtual ban on trade unions, the preservation of starvation wages, the removal of any restrictions on the repatriation of profits" (Hallward 2010:15). Later financial support provided via structural adjustment programs would strip down state-supported social services and open local markets to global competition through lowered taxes. According to Hallward (2010), these prerequisites for aid to Haiti work "to undermine the public sector, to do away with institutions and policies that might empower the poor majority, and to consolidate at all levels the grip on the economy of the dominant transnational class" (5).

Many suggest (Babb 2005; Goldsmith 1997 for example) that SAPs can be considered new forms of colonialism because they restructure economies and create

vulnerable populations who, receiving no support in the form of social services, often rely on transnational family networks in order to diversify sources of income to support the family group (Massey et al. 1993: 436). Simultaneously, receiving countries such as the United States and the European Union gain from what is increasingly becoming a dual labor market in which they depend upon often Black and Brown migrants to take up low-paying, temporary jobs with no possibility of upward mobility (Massey et al 1993; Piore 1979).⁷ This has created a crisis where already marginalized populations in the receiving countries are pushed out of the market altogether or forced to compete with migrant labor.

In the Caribbean, where colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism have shaped national economies, migration becomes a fact of life, as citizens of these nations deem it necessary to move for economic survival and sometimes even their own safety. For migrant women, these conditions have particular ramifications which will be expanded upon in towards the end of the literature review. While core countries continue to recruit migrant, and in particular, Caribbean labor, such labor is regulated and controlled through migration policies for the benefit of core countries. As Jordens (2009) notes, post-9/11 policies for migration into the United States have become even more controlled and militarized, with policies even extending into sending countries themselves. Thus, many of these global moves are determined not only by those migrants make themselves but also by the circumstances of local and transnational markets that receive migrant labor.

3. Migration and Transnationalism

⁷ Michael J. Piore (1979), the major proponent of dual market theory, argues that migration occurs in major part because of the demand from industrial societies for this temporary labor. Thus, unlike neoclassical economic theory, the desire for better wages is not the only incentive for people to make the rational choice to migrate, but rather, the recruitment practices by corporations (and sometimes in collaborations with governments) actively entices individuals to migrate for these positions.

The field of migration studies has embraced the term “transmigrant.”

Anthropologists Basch et al.’s heralding of the term “transmigrant” opened up the field of migration to focusing less on how migrants become assimilated into the receiving country and more how sending countries are never truly left behind as migrants make transnational bonds between their two countries through remittances, investments in the homeland, and other forms of engagement in both nations (1995:48). Based on her own multi-year research of Haitian migrants in New York, Glick-Schiller (1994) insisted that transnationalism was a way to describe how migrants can impact their homelands. However, there are limits to transnationalism. Guarnizo and Smith provide a structural critique of transnational studies in order to emphasize that transnationalism occurs from both above and below. While globalization apparently allows the freer movements of people across borders and enables transnational bonds to take place, one must be wary of the ways in which such transnational practices can become co-opted by the state to suit its purposes (Guarnizo and Smith 1998:6).⁸

The impact “transmigrants” have on their home country largely depends upon the recognition of their practices by the state. Portes (2013) cautions that transnational professionals who provide remittances and eventually do return to their home countries with transferrable skills cannot sustainably develop their home countries if their governments do not get involved in supporting these efforts. However, as mentioned by Guarnizo and Smith, such support from the state can serve to encourage further transnationalism as a source of revenue rather than shifting actual state support to its people.

⁸ Rodriguez’s (2010) landmark study of how Philippine migrants are marketed by their state as transnational, and thus lucrative flexible labor, provides a strong example of the way transnationalism itself can be co-opted by the state to suit its participate purposes.

Eckstein points out that “Diasporas, in the aggregate, sometimes even remit more money than multinational companies invest in [their] home countries. Accordingly, immigrants have become a vital source of funds for capital-poor countries of origin” (2013:16). Women and women of color contribute greatly to this vital source of funds by migrating abroad since migration becomes a way to support other family members.

In her study of transnational communities, Levitt (2001) argues for a middle ground between Guarnizo and Smith’s stances. As she argues, the impact of transnationalism heightens where migrants create transnational communities which involve family and members of the community in both the home country and the receiving country. Indeed, networks of migrants from the same ethnic group establish initial support for new migrants coming to a receiving country. However, Levitt argues, the families and communities of those left behind in the receiving country are also shaped by transnational networks. Thus, for Levitt, it is at the level of community that transnationalism and cultural recognition of diaspora emerge.

Particularly within the Caribbean, transnationalism can have multiple implications for migrants. Much of this is based on the history of migration to the receiving country. In their study, Portes and Grosfoguel (1994) compare the success of Caribbean migrants in the United States based not on national origins but on reception and their previous relationship with the United States. Jamaican migrants, for example, were recruited to labor in the United States in the 1960s due to restrictions of British migration and have thus done well economically and socially since their professional and manual labor were deemed valuable. As Waters (1999) notes in her own work on Jamaican immigrants, Jamaican migrants distance themselves from African American and other Afro-Caribbean migrants when such

identification works to their advantage in the labor market. Identifying with the African American population, according to Thornton, Taylor, and Chatters (2013), only emerged within those groups who were excluded from United States based on culture and language. As they found, Afro-Caribbean migrants from Haiti and Spanish speaking countries found more affinities with Afro-American communities than Jamaicans.

Portes and Grosfoguel (1994) argue that “modes of incorporation” or, “the process of insertion of an immigrant group at different levels of the host society....encompass government policies, mainstream attitudes toward the newcomers, and the size and characteristics of the preexisting ethnic community” and influence how well migrants do abroad (1994:62). Migrants who are systematically excluded from a society may choose to focus on their transnational connections and remaining culturally distinct continues to be valuable as a form of cultural solidarity or not based on discrimination. While transmigrants can certainly form communities based on their ties to their homeland, to what extent a transnational community emerges also depends on the level of integration for migrants in the receiving country.

One could argue that this is based on culture and class. Haitians in New York, predominantly made up of the first wave of refugees exiled during Papa Doc Duvalier’s regime (1957 to 1971), are, for the most part, successfully integrated into New York culture and had more opportunities for success due to “an essentially neutral reception” (Portes and Grosfoguel 1994:64). However, when lower class Haitian refugees arrived in the 1980s to Florida’s shores on rickety, over-full boats, the stigmas attached to them also affected the reception of New York migrants. Their previous parity with Jamaicans shifted downwards as a result of their Haitian peers in Miami. Haitians in Florida and in New York had unique

experiences that differentiate how they conceive of themselves as a transnational or a diasporic community. As Foner (1998) argues, such comparisons are useful for understanding the nuances of migratory experiences, and how a transnational and diasporic community develops.

Haiti has a long history of migration, although its history of migration to the United States was mainly during two major “waves” of migration. These waves consisted of those who fled to New York during the Duvalier regime of the 1960s and 70s, and those who travelled by boat to Florida in the 1980s and 1990s. However, to fully understand Haiti’s place in the literature requires an understanding of how it is received by other countries. Its unique reception as an excluded community but, often, a necessary labor source, parallels the experience of a number of formerly colonized countries, such as Jamaica, whose people are still characterized by race-based categories which mark them as bodies for labor and as outsiders. Haitian migration to the United States, the Caribbean and the rest of North America, is representative of the experience of Caribbean migration mainly because of the unique reception of Haitian migrants in other countries, and also because of their long history of movement throughout the Caribbean.

3. Gender, Global Migration, and Transnationalism

Gender is a key component of how global labor pools are created and, indeed, multiple studies (Brennan 2004; Freeman 2000;) show that while women are uniquely impacted by global capitalism, SAPs, and consequent migratory labor, but at the same time, navigate transnational spaces to their advantage for jobs, visas, and alternate forms of capital. Currently, understanding women as migrant and transnational laborers involves situating women within a global capitalist framework. Focusing on the role gender plays in

migration and, in particular, the experience of women, remains an important aspect of understanding migration (Pedraza 1991). Women within the periphery experience distinct and differential consequences of these processes and, as key supports for families and communities not only bear the brunt of such shifts but also gain a unique perspective on the globalization of labor. Indeed, Honagneu-Sotelo argues for situating gender within studies of migration and colonial and neocolonial projects:

Gender remains one of the fundamental social relations that anchor and impact immigration patterns including labour migration as well as professional class migrations and refugee movements. Gender is deeply implicated in imperialist, military and colonial conquests, which are widely recognized as the roots of global international migration flows. Once immigration movements begin, they take form in markedly gendered ways. (Honagneu-Sotelo 2013: 233).

According to Rosetta and Nadira Khalideen (2002), SAPs have contributed to more personal losses for Caribbean workers and, in particular, Caribbean women⁹ who—due to devalued currency, lowered wages, and tenuous employment in the wake of structural adjustment programs—must seek extra employment in the informal sector. Such labor may include part-time work, contract labor, illegal work such prostitution and smuggling, or other forms of informal labor in order to support family members. Harrison (2008) argues that women are integral to structural adjustment programs as they “take up the slack” when social services are slashed. She continues:

Structural adjustment depends on the cultural production of discourses and images about masculine dignity and feminine sacrifice, especially that of women of color.

⁹ According to Christine G. T. Ho (1999), Black Caribbean women claim a unique form of exploitation that has colonial roots embedded in racialized conceptions of what constitutes women’s work. She argues for the particularity of the Caribbean women’s experience within the larger conversation on gender, transnationalism and labor. This has a colonial precedent since historically women have worked alongside men as slaves, and, in the present still share the responsibility in supporting themselves and their families outside the home (Ho 1999). Thus, Black Caribbean women become important to studies of migration, transnationalism, and gender, particularly because of their key role in the labor force and because such a role has a history in the colonial era. Still, building from Mohanty’s 1984 argument, I insist that women’s experiences cannot be generalized as being either First World or Third World. Although such colonial histories do influence women’s experiences, how they respond to and live within these contexts are always in changing.

Furthermore, the policy is able to operate in the first place because of widespread expectations and role hierarchies ensuring that women will have to take up the slack when jobs and social safety nets are slashed and eliminated. (Harrison 2008: 32)

Women, therefore, are particularly affected by structural adjustment and become key contributors to the ability of families and nations to cope in the midst of economic decline in the neoliberal era.

Federici (2014) argues that women's informal means of sustaining themselves and their families have always been integral to the smooth running of the capitalist system and men's control of women through what she calls the "patriarchy of the wage" (98). In order for the system to continue, these gender norms take on a cultural component, so that it becomes "natural" for women to join the workforce informally, or to take on more unpaid work. Here, political economy and culture are tightly interwoven as they reinforce one another to maintain a system of control through gender. However, while women have experienced unique forms of oppression, they have historically been at the forefronts of resistance to such structures. With the increased labor load, women become even more integral to families and the larger communities. This places them at strategic areas to become leaders at the grassroots level and beyond.

How women are affected during economic decline is largely dependent upon intersections of race, class, and nation. Indeed, moves to redefine the labor sending states constitute, for Harrison, a state of "global apartheid" (Harrison 2008) that relies on gendered and racial markers to designate certain bodies for labor. Harrison emphasizes that women of color experience a unique form of exploitation within this system since, as she says:

Women, disproportionately women of color concentrated in the southern hemisphere, have been designated as a "new colonial frontier" for flexible capital accumulation. The neoliberal regime of development depends on gender-dependent dichotomies, such as "women's work" and "men's work," that are supported by

patriarchal assumptions that sewing, assembling electronic components, and pursuing home- and community-based informal activities are extensions of women's natural activities requiring no special skills, training, or compensation. (Harrison 2008: 31)

Women migrants, then, experience exploitation in increasingly multiple intersectional ways that encompass class, nation, race, colonial history, and other identities with material consequences for those who decide to move globally.

Burton, in her overview of social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean points to the ways Haitian women function as key members of their communities in Haiti: "semi-autonomous entrepreneurial market women are key to the Haitian economy and to the survival of the Haitian family" (Burton 2004: 784). She also asserts: "Gender and gender dynamics are clearly central to determining, shaping and organizing the experience of transmigration and play a pivotal role in restructuring identities, shifting political loyalties, building communities, and imagining new ways of being" (775). Haitian women have "a long tradition of women's organizing in a history replete with tales of Haitian women willing to fight in whatever ways are necessary to support their families and their communities" (Burton 2004:784). As transnationals living in the diaspora, women can cull from this unique experience to become politicized. Haitian women have a history not only of political activism but also work as leaders in their communities.

Thus, Haiti and Haitian migrants become key for understanding the role women play in holding up communities. The experience of Haitian political activism both at home and abroad thus cannot be understood without analyzing the important impact of women as they hold up their families, communities, and the nation. Haitian migrant women who migrate often carry these values with them and maintain such support transnationally as well as in their communities of diaspora.

4. Conclusions: Haitian Diaspora in Little Haiti, Florida as a Case Study

To look at migrant labor as one part of the evolution of the expansion of global capitalism is to emphasize the “global relations of unequal power” inherent in processes of migration and globalization. It is also the case these relationships exist outside the bounds of the nation-state (Glick-Schiller 2013: 17). Migration, and by extension, diaspora, must also be considered within a context of imperialism and capitalism. This consideration opens up insights into the relations of power which control migrant movements, such as immigration policies, economic trends which affect job availability and, at times, state violence, and also creates a space for describing locations where migrants have used their precarious condition to identify as diaspora and thus form political groups of resistance. Such actions may also rely on transnational networks to influence political and social change in the sending countries. Culture, then, and its maintenance across national boundaries could become an avenue for resistance against global structures of capitalism as well as against newer forms of colonization that are based on structural adjustment and flexible accumulation. Haiti, with its long histories of colonization, resistance, and migration serves as a microcosm of these processes in the periphery.

Defining a group as diaspora does not preclude any other forms of identity. Transnationalism as a migratory practice now institutionalized in the Haitian political sphere complicates the diasporic experience as it encourages Haitians to use their citizenship in another country to the benefit of Haiti. Reinforcing these ties involves “diasporic citizenship” and a negotiating of what it means to be Black, Haitian, and American, in a way reminiscent of DuBois’ (1999) concept of double-consciousness. Here, instead of simply

race, intersections of nationality, class, and citizenship interpolate Haitian diaspora in ways which reflect new possibilities for understanding the diasporic experience not just as a cultural signifier but as a material relation fraught with tensions of identity, class, and nation.

Such a diasporic experience entails the maintenance of community solidarity and transnational links. Political activism becomes a way of “practicing citizenship” and reinforcing one of the many ties Haitian migrants may have. As Nyers and Rygiel argue, “citizenship is more than a legal institution, because it includes moments of political engagement such that those lacking formal citizenship status, by acting and claiming rights to citizenship, in effect practise citizenship (Isin 2009)” (2012:2). However, these practices of citizenship can also serve to challenge the very idea of nationalism in ways which go beyond transnationalism and the typical conceptions of the nation-state. To conceive of oneself as part of a politically active diaspora is to entail a shift away from the nation-state which also permits the possibility of being critical of the state. Straddling two nation-states not only calls into question the idea of nationalism and allegiance to one state, but it also challenges the idea of nation-states as ideal through the identification as diaspora.

The study of Little Haiti and its relation to the rest of Miami and its large ethnic population illuminates the ways in which conceiving of oneself as part of a diaspora fits within one’s political imaginary. Cohen defines the most recent phase of diaspora studies as the consolidation phase in which classical understandings of diaspora accommodate its new forms such as victim, labor, imperial, trade, and deterritorialized diaspora ([2002] 2008: 18). Within the Caribbean, a cultural diaspora, as he describes exists which encompasses Gilroy’s (1993) conception of the Black Atlantic and Hall’s refiguring of cultural diaspora

(1990). Cohen argues that an empirical case for this particular kind of diaspora has not been fully documented. As he says, “I remain convinced that a more solid and accurate undertaking of the nation of the Caribbean cultural diaspora will only be possible by gathering full historical information and sociological data” (Cohen 1998:33). This study on Haitian diaspora aims to fill in this gap.

Haiti has not only had a long history of migrant movement but also of political activism as part of their cultural history. Based on this history, one can argue that Haitians abroad have developed a culture of political activism. Re-examining Haitians as a cultural diaspora, particularly in the United States, and more directly in the ethnic enclave of Little Haiti in Miami, points to the ways in which cultural diaspora is enacted as a source of solidarity in place where Haitians stand out as a marginalized group. Miami, a multicultural city segregated by cultural and racial differences presents a key example of a global city but also a microcosm of an increasingly globalized yet stratified world. To look at the experience of Haitians, particularly those who choose Little Haiti as their home or place of finding community allows one to examine the ways in which class, race, language, and culture intersect to create a cultural diasporic experience.

HAITI: A HISTORY, MIGRATION, AND DIASPORA

1. Haiti: a History

Haiti, located in the Caribbean, lies about 90 miles southeast from Cuba and about 800 miles from the Florida coast. It shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, a country with which it has a shared colonial history and tenuous relationship involving cross-border migration and a current of contestations of citizenship tinged by racism and resentment. The nation of Haiti, first and foremost, has the title of being the “first Black republic in the world and the second independent republic of the Western Hemisphere” (Zéphir 2004: 41). As detailed below, its successful slave revolt began in 1791 and ended in the birth of Haiti as a nation on January 1, 1804.

However, what many in the West hear and tend to repeat via the media and in academia is the other designation of Haiti as the “poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere”. Indeed, with a GDP of \$8.287 billion (exchange rate), 80 percent of its population living in poverty, and 45 percent living in abject poverty in a nation of approximately 9.9 million, one can see that Haiti experiences especial levels of economic decline (CIA Factbook Haiti 2014).

1.1 The Slave Trade

It was on the island of Hispaniola that Christopher Columbus, as a representative of Spain, landed on in 1492. Using the native Taino population as labor decimated the island people, and in 1500 Spain imported African labor for the production of sugar cane (Zéphir 2004). In the 1600s, France, England, and the Dutch each fought for their share of the island. In 1695, the Treaty of Ryswick split Hispaniola into two colonial properties. To the east, Spain owned what it called the Dominican Republic, and the western third of the island was

called San Domingo and became a French property. France imported millions of slaves to labor in sugar plantations and produce lucrative sugar for its European market. San Domingo rapidly became a profitable sugar producer, producing 10,000 tons of raw sugar each year (James 1989: 48) and, according to Farmer, San Domingo, “on the eve of the American Revolution ... generated more revenue than all thirteen North American colonies combined” and “by 1789, the colony supplied three-fourths of the world’s sugar” (1994:63). Indeed, relative to the rest of France’s colonies, San Domingo was the most profitable, and, according to James, “the market of the new world” (1989:50). As a comparison, James writes: “In 1789 Britain’s export trade would be 27 million pounds, that of France 17 million pounds, of which the trade of San Domingo would account for nearly 11 million pounds” (1989:50).

However, these generations of profit came at the expense of a brutal slave system which wrenched ethnic groups from the continent of Africa away from their homes to live short, brutal lives as workers in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Farmer refers to historian Debien’s estimate that “between 1766 and 1775, the quasi-totality of one sugar plantation’s slaves were replaced by ‘new blood,’ most of it in newly arrived Africans” (Farmer 1994: 62, as cited in Debien, 1962 p. 62). Indeed, between 1784 and 1791, an average of 29,000 slaves were imported *per year* to San Domingo to work on the plantations (Farmer 1994: 63). The plantation system in Haiti created a complex, three-part system made up of whites (upper, middle, and lower class) and Blacks (mulattos, freed Blacks, and slaves). Maroons, or escaped slaves, lived in the inaccessible mountains and periodically conducted raids on the colonies. This stratified system of Black designations would later become a class issue as Mulattos and Free Blacks, while below Whites in socially, could receive an education in

France and even own slaves. Thus, Haiti's history of slavery represents a microcosm of this particular period of human oppression in world history.

1.2 Revolution and Nationhood

However, in 1758, Mackandal, a maroon leader, initiated Haiti's first slave revolt. He was captured and executed. This led to another plan to revolt, this time initiated by Voudou priest and influential Black leader Boukman. Thus, on August 22, 1791, the Haitian revolution began. Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave, joined the growing slave rebellion and led the revolt against the whites using the recent French revolution (1789-1799) as a rallying call and justification for the end of slavery. L'Ouverture was joined by the future Haitian leaders Christophe Dessalines and Henri Christophe. In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte sent his nephew Charles Leclerc and 12,000 French troops to quell the rebellion. Dessalines suggested complete independence from France rather than simply abolition (slavery was abolished in the colony in 1793). In 1802, L'Ouverture was arrested and sent in exile to France where he died in 1803. However, the fighting continued and, on January 1st, 1804, San Domingo became the first Black republic and renamed itself Haiti after its traditional Taino name. In October of that year, Dessalines declared himself emperor. During this time, French planters and their slaves, as well as others fled Haiti in the midst of the revolution and Haiti's birth as a nation.

The significance of this event is perhaps most emphasized in its silencing by the Western powers and by Haiti's treatment by outside nations in its subsequent years. As Trouillot writes:

The Haitian Revolution was the ultimate test to the rest of the universalist pretensions of both the French and the American revolutions. And they both failed. *In 1791, there is no public debate on the record, in France, in England, or in the*

United States on the right of black slaves to achieve self-determination, and the right to do so by way of armed resistance. (1995:88)

Indeed, the political history of Haiti post-revolution is turbulent, and the use of silences to downplay and control a population which would soon form a diaspora.

Soon after becoming a new republic, the United States, also a progeny of revolution, placed an embargo on Haiti in 1806. In 1825, France accepted Haiti's sovereignty on condition of receiving 150 million francs in reparations over a period of five years. Then President Boyer accepted these terms. Germany, Great Britain, and the United States also sought reparation for their part in the conflict and, as a result, "repayment of these loans consumed approximately 80 percent of the national revenue by the end of the nineteenth century" (Zéphir 2004: 44). With this staggering debt at its conception, Haiti began with a rocky economic start. In addition, tensions between mulatto elite and Black former slave population were never fully resolved. These racial and class differences became part of the cultural and economic structure of Haiti where elites maintained power over the Haitian state and former slaves lived by subsistence farming in the countryside and paid tribute to those in state power. Trouillot (1990) describes such historical differences as contributing to the pitting of "state against nation" in Haiti. The elite takeover at the expense of the rural peasantry coupled with a number of political overthrows and military rulers led to overall political instability which has been a part of Haiti's history up to the near present (Robinson [1996] 1998; Trouillot 1990). As Zéphir (2004) writes, "from 1804 to 2002, Haiti has been ruled by 37 presidents, from Dessalines to Aristide—some lasting several years, while others were exiled or killed in office after serving only a few months—and seven military juntas" (43).

1.3 United States Occupation and the context of Duvalier

In 1915, the United States military would initiate its first occupation of Haiti lasting from 1915 to 1934. During its occupation, United States bankers took control of Haiti's national bank, consolidated its debt, and invested in its own businesses on the island—even amending the Haitian constitution to allow foreigners to own local land. Playing on the racial tensions, the U.S. military placed Mulatto elites into high-ranking positions over the majority Black population and developed what would become Haiti's self-sustaining military force, called the *gendarmerie* (Zéphir 2004). The rest of the population endured a forced labor system called *corvée*. Such a system established the military elite and its close connection to political power that is still present today, and, while the U.S. leaders there created some infrastructure, there was no democracy or economic investment in the people. The combination of an oppressive power structure and no social investment further undermined Haiti's development. The US military left in 1934, and in its passing grew *noirisme*, a Black social movement in response to the occupation by U.S. whites and the mulatto elite. Such a movement fueled enthusiasm for the election of Black President Dumarsais Estime, and soon, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier.

1.4 Duvalierism

François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, a former doctor from which his nickname originated, initiated the first of Haiti's notorious dictatorships during his rule as “President for life” from 1957 to 1971. During this period, Pape Doc created his own personal army called the *Garde Présidentielle*, and formed another army made up of civilians whose wages consisted of whatever they could extort from locals (Trouillot 1990). They became known as the *Tontons Macoutes* who, through violence and local surveillance networks, controlled the

Haitian population through terror. “Papa Doc” Duvalier also dismantled public institutions and forced the professionals who worked in these areas into exile. This constituted Haiti’s first major wave of refugees. From 1960 to 1971, according to official numbers, 34,499 Haitians migrated to the US and many others moved elsewhere throughout the Caribbean, North America, and Europe (Zéphir 2004).

At Papa Doc’s death, his nineteen year-old son, Jean Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, was sworn in as President for life. Unlike his father, Baby Doc publicly vowed to the international community that he would be a more humane ruler to his people as well as open up Haiti to foreign trade. While Baby Doc’s claims prompted foreign investment which generated tourism and low wage jobs in Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital, such investment ultimately ended up in the coffers of his own corrupt government elite networks and plunged the rest of Haiti’s population further into poverty. Zéphir notes that between 1976 and 1981, “the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty rose from 48 per cent ... to 81 per cent” (Zéphir 2004: 50 as cited in Arthur and Dash, 1999:49). In addition, violence continued as the *Tontons Macoutes* kept up their oppression of Haiti’s citizens in secret and political dissenters were disappeared into Haiti’s prisons. In 1972, Haitians began escaping to Florida via rickety boats, and in the 1980s, this number swelled to the thousands. According to various counts, between 50,000 and 70,000 came by boat to the United States and another 5,000-10,000 by plane (Stepick 1989). Official counts from US census suggest a Haitian population of 123,835, but historically, local leaders challenged the census for undercounting the population. Under U.S. President Clinton’s policy, many of these boats of refugees were required to be apprehended and its people sent back to Haiti or detained in Guantanamo Bay, a military base in Cuba, that would later become notorious as a torture

center. The impact of Haiti's poverty was compounded when in the 1980s, based on recommendations from the U.S., Haiti's swine population was decimated to prevent the spread of African swine flu. While the Inter-American Institute of Cooperative Agriculture replaced the pigs, this policy crippled Haiti's rural population who depended on these local pigs not only for sustenance but also saw such animals as an investment. The pigs with which they were replaced were not native and required expensive maintenance. Growing popular resentment finally led to the overthrow of Baby Doc Duvalier in 1986. He was flown out by a US plane to France where he remained in exile until he died October 4, 2014 after returning to Haiti in 2011 (Charles 2014).

1.5 Aristide, the earthquake, and today

After Baby Doc's departure, Haiti's political leadership changed hands through military leaders and coups. At the same time Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest and liberation theologian, gained a local following which soon culminated in the *Lavalas* party, a political group made up of networks of citizens (Aristide 1990). Aristide was encouraged by the people to run for President, and, in February 1991, he was elected president by popular vote. However, the military, which had become an established political power in its own right, overthrew Aristide in September of that same year. Haitians at home and abroad protested his overthrow, and the campaign for his return showed the political power of the diaspora and local Haitian majority.

After another United States occupation and a trade embargo in 1994, Aristide was allowed to return to finish the remainder of his presidency (Hallward 2010). During this time, Aristide popularized the symbolic concept of Haiti's "tenth department" of the government made up of Haiti's diaspora abroad. René Préval, a member of the *Lavalas*

party, won the next elections in 1996 and remained president until 2001. Aristide was elected again in 2001, but his government was crippled by limited funding and mounting pressure from disgruntled military and former elites who resented his social programs to help the poor majority. Aristide was overthrown again in 2004. U.S. forces came in and occupied Haiti for a third time (Hallward 2010). Boniface Alexandre was chosen as his successor before René Préval came to power once more from 2006-2011.

In January 2010, a category 7 earthquake shook Haiti, and devastated the economy and local infrastructure. UN Peacekeeping troops were sent to the nation and have remained a controversial presence in Haiti with claims of corruption and accusations of initiating a cholera outbreak which killed 7,500 and made at least 580,000 ill (Katz 2013). Indeed, their military presence has increased tensions amongst the local population (Katz 2013).

Currently, Michel Martelly (2011-current), a former singer, governs Haiti as president. At each significant point in Haiti's history, waves of migrants have left the country to escape instability and political persecution. Haiti's diasporic presence is strong, and now the so-called eleventh department is not only a symbolic but a political presence in Haiti.¹⁰

2. Haitian Migration

Historically, research on Haitian populations has predominantly concentrated on New York since this state has historically been an entry point for many Haitians, particularly

¹⁰ As of June 2012, Haitians living abroad and children born abroad of Haitian citizens can gain dual citizenship in Haiti (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2013). Privileges accorded those with dual citizenship include the right to vote in elections and partake in local politics (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2012).

upper and middle class, who left Haiti before and during the first Duvalier regime.¹¹ This group was made up mostly of middle- and upper-class Haitians who received a predominantly neutral reception. However, later waves of Haitian migration centered in Miami, Florida and consisted of mostly working-class individuals and families. These migrants received a different, more negative reception and have endured prominent ostracism not only in the local spaces of Miami but also via U.S. national policies which have limited their access to jobs, residency in the United States, and citizenship.

Scholars Nina Glick-Schiller and George Fouron have detailed the activities of the Haitian diaspora in New York, and Stepick on Haitians in Miami in the 1980s. However, both authors emphasize the local experiences of Haitians in Miami and do not sufficiently explore the role transnational ties play for Haitians in Miami — a global city made up of rigid cultural groups who strongly influence opportunities for labor-pools in the area and have the ability to not only survive in the diaspora but maintain transnational links. Miami is a unique site for studying diasporic identity and community because of its concentration of migrant enclaves and racial tensions. Studying Haitians, who have a history of diasporic community in New York, shows how their experience of different forms of marginalization can precipitate the formation of transnational links. Focusing on a community center in Little Haiti reveals the ways in which groups navigate their particularly unique excluded status in Miami and in particular, the ethnic enclave of Little Haiti.

¹¹ Indeed, social scientists Alex Stepick and Alejandro Portes' research on Haitians in Miami has historically stood out as representative of the data collected on this city's Haitian population. Alex Stepick, who teaches at Florida International University in Miami, was referenced by two of my interviewees who were familiar with his work.

2.1 Haitians in the Caribbean and North America

Haitian migrants have migrated not only within the Caribbean but also across the island of Hispaniola itself. As Catanese (1999) notes, on-island migration is a key part of Haitian patterns of migration. After the Haitian revolution ended in 1804 and in the century after, Haitians moved from the previously colonized plantations to “previously unsettled mountains and plateaus of the interior” (53). This helped form Haiti’s rural peasant population which stands at odds with its urban elite. As poverty increased, members of the rural population moved back to the urban centers of Haiti to find work.

Haitian migrants also move across the border to work as agricultural laborers in the Dominican Republic’s sugar plantations. Martinez calls this wave of migrants “peripheral migrants” as they constitute “untold numbers of migrants across the Third World who neither move to the cities of the south nor emigrate to the countries of the north but circulate from one rural periphery to another” (1995:3). Haiti has had a long history of migration to and from the Dominican Republic, its island neighbor. By 1930, over 30,000 Haitians had migrated to the Dominican Republic for temporary and permanent work (Portes and Grosfoguel 1994: 51). However, this relationship was fraught with tension and even violence. In 1937, Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic over the span of three days. According to Pons (2010), 14,000 Haitians were killed. Such a move was Trujillo’s attempt to solidify Dominican identity and purge its Afro-Caribbean influence. However, Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic continues unabated.

Haitians also migrated to Cuba in two waves of migration. The first waves of Haitians were Cuban coffee exporters who fled Haiti during its revolution and later moved

to the US. The second wave consisted of Haitians, amongst other Caribbean workers, recruited to work in United States-owned sugar cane production in Cuba in the early 20th century and, by 1930, numbered 100,000 Haitians (Portes and Grosfoguel, 1994: 51). Catanese (1999) notes that between 1903 and 1910, a total 500,000 legal and illegal Haitian migrants came to Cuba, and that they were desired for their “only assets [which] were physical strength and know-how as common laborers who could cut sugarcane” (56).

During the Haitian revolution, Haitians also migrated to the Bahamas, either permanently or, as a stepping point before migrating to the United States. As Louis Jr. points out, Haitians make up “the largest migrant group in the Bahamas (approximately 30,000 to 60,000 Haitians)” (2012:84). There, they typically work in agriculture, and, while their labor is necessary, they are routinely discriminated against. Louis Jr. notes that Bahamian culture is traditionally exclusionary due to its colonial past, but that is reinforced by the second-class status of Haitian workers. Such exclusion, Louis Jr. suggests, may contribute to a heightened Haitian identity, but one that is conflicted as such identity is viewed with low regard.

A significant presence of Haitian migrants live in Canada where one would assume they could find a safe haven within its prominent French minority. French-speaking Caribbean professionals and manual laborers were recruited, respectively, in the 1940s and 1970s. However, Madibbo (2006) notes that Black Francophones are both a racial and linguistic minority. Such a position has made Black Francophone, and thus Haitian, integration into Canadian society difficult as they are still seen as outsider immigrants—even though many may be second and third generation. Madibbo (2006) shows that where alliances between Anglo Francophone and Black Francophone populations have not existed,

instead, Black Francophone individuals have formed their own social activist groups and made key alliances with the Black Anglophone population in order to gain political representation and power for both groups.

2.2 Haitians in the United States

Haitians also have a long history of migration to the United States. Social scientists note three peak waves of Haitian migration to the United States: during the Haitian revolution and its aftermath (1791-1810), in the US occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), and under the Duvalier and post-Duvalier regime (1957-1994) (Laguerre 1998). During the revolution, as many colonial planters and their slaves fled to nations throughout the Caribbean, a small number of them went to the Southern United States, particularly Louisiana where French planters and Haitian slaves contributed to the French-Creole population. During the François Duvalier regime of the 1950s and 60s, mostly middle-class and upper-class professionals fled to New York where they formed political activist groups and community service organizations. These groups were closely related as Haitians desired to integrate, but remain politically active and cognizant of politics of Haiti.

This politically active community was notably documented in Basch et al.'s *Nations Unbound* (1994) which argued that Haitian migrants in the United States are one of a number of examples of ethnic communities which remained tied to the homeland and remained actively engaged as transmigrants. Their anthropological work set the stage for discussions of transnationalism. They introduced the idea of seeing nation-states with transnational immigrant populations as deterritorialized. As Glick-Schiller notes in a later work:

persons who have emigrated and their descendants are defined as continuing to belong to the polity from which they originated. They are seen as having rights and

responsibilities in that state even if they have adopted the language and culture of their new country and have become legal citizens in their new home. (1998: 133)

While Basch et al. (1994) allocate part of their discussion to Haitians in Miami in their book, they refer to Stepick, who provided key statistics on Haitians in Miami during the late 1980s and early 1990s, for their data on Haitians in Miami.

Wah and Pierre-Louis (2004) note that Haitians in New York, due to their status, are marginalized and politically aware. They have also focused on group formation across Haitian class differences in order to maintain solidarity: “Haitians in New York City form a triple minority group, marginalized linguistically, racially, and nationally. As a result, Haitian immigrants have learned to reshape their organizations’ structures to include members of various classes and backgrounds to pursue their common interests” (Wah and Pierre-Louis 2004: 160). That is, marginalization reinforced their unity as a transnational community in the United States.

However, it was not until the 1990s that Haitians in New York took on a specifically diasporic identity after Aristide was overthrown in the 1990s. Wah and Pierre-Louis note, “Haitians who wanted to return home realized that the political and economic conditions of Haiti would not allow them to do so” (2004: 154). Thus, they focused on adopting U.S. citizenship, retiring, and putting their efforts into hometown associations which “largely focus their efforts on matters that relate to their homeland, more specifically to their town of origin” (2004: 154). Such work led to the forming of Haiti's tenth department or, “*Dizyem Departman-an*” whose U.S. office opened in 1994 “in the very center of the Brooklyn Haitian enclave in New York City” (Basch, et. al 1994: 146; Wah-Pierre Louis, 2004:154).

Thus, Haitians became known for their transnational and diasporic characteristics, or what Laguerre terms “diasporic citizenship....a set of practices that a person is engaged in,

and a set of rights acquired or appropriated, that cross nation-state boundaries and that indicate membership in at least two nation-states” (1998: 190). He argues that this particular form of citizenship has allowed Haitians to not only recreate Haiti for their fellow Haitian compatriots abroad, but use their citizenship in the United States to influence U.S. policy towards Haiti. Thus, diasporic citizenship implies a political responsibility to the homeland that exists outside of one’s nation of residence.

2.3 Haitians in Miami

The experience of Haitians in Miami can be understood as particularly different from that of Haitians in New York. Miami has been termed a “global city,” “multilingual, multicultural experiment [which] holds important lessons for what the American city will be about in a changed world,” and “a model for future social and political relations nationwide” (Croucher 1997:20; Lipsitz 1999:213; Portes and Stepick 1993: xiv). Miami, a “bicultural” city with high competition for jobs has pushed Haitians into forming their own informal economy as a result of their discrimination in the workplace and in the media (Stepick 1989). Having suffered marginalization by portrayal as boat people with AIDS, as well as false accusations of tuberculosis, Stepick asserts that there is “a consistent U.S. policy designed to repress the flow of Haitian refugees to Miami” (1992:57). The experience of Haitians in Miami is particularly unique as it involves systematic marginalization of a population made up mostly of lower-class Haitians as compared to their upper- and middle-class compatriots in New York. As Stepick writes, “In contrast to previous flows to the United States, the boat people are primarily poor, rural, and black” (1987:137).

In the 1970s, Haitians from New York began to move south to Miami. However, these upper-class Haitians could afford to live in the suburbs of Miami, Dade, and Palm

Beach County (Stepick 1998). Haitians living in Little Haiti, an ethnic enclave in the northern half of the vast city of Miami,¹² consist mostly of the newly arrived. As they become established, some eventually move to the surrounding suburbs. Thus, the population of those who settle Little Haiti becomes a unique sub-set for understanding how migrant marginalization fuels the formation of diasporic communities.

Those Haitians with capital from their previous employment, and with support from ethnic communities in Haiti, may have a different transition experience in Miami to those entering Miami as new migrants. Stepick and Portes (1986) note that newly arrived Haitian migrant boat people “were defined, from the start, as a redundant labor force and were deprived the de facto protection provided by employers to established sources of immigrant labor” (347). This exclusion from the labor force has thus pushed this particular sub-group of Haitian migrants into the informal economy for survival. As Stepick notes: “Haitians have created their own informal sector that closely resembles the original descriptions of this phenomenon in the Third World cities: casual self-employment isolated from the broader market and the use of informal enterprise primarily as a survival mechanism” (1989: 126). This informal economy has given rise to close-knit diasporic communities in Little Haiti and makes this particular population crucial for delving more into the experience of diaspora and its material basis.

¹² The exact boundaries of Little Haiti are being contested because of continuing gentrification. The generally agreed upon boundaries of Little Haiti consists of roughly five and a half blocks within the city of Miami. It stretches from 82nd to street to the north all the way to 36th avenue to the south. From there, it is four miles to downtown Miami.

METHODS

Little Haiti is an ethnic neighborhood made up mostly of Haitian immigrants and their families, many of them recent arrivals. For this study, I interviewed eight people of Haitian descent who were or had been in the past actively involved with the Little Haiti Community Support Center (LHCSC), an organization officially focused on supporting incoming Haitian migrant families. The LHCSC is located within “Little Haiti,” a neighborhood within the city of Miami, Florida. Outside of my research, I volunteered at the LHCSC as an English as a Second Language instructor. I also explored and observed the community of Little Haiti through taking pictures and meeting interviewees in areas both in and nearby the community. Little Haiti is a significant site for exploring transnationalism and diaspora as this population uses the discourse of transnationalism and diaspora to build community in the face of marginalization.

Little Haiti and the surrounding neighborhoods in Miami and Miami-Dade county are key sites for studying not only Haitian migration and transnationalism, but migrant and ethnic communities in general. Little Haiti is only one of many ethnic communities within the larger city of Miami and Miami-Dade County. For example, Little Haiti sits north of downtown Miami and borders the 95, a major thoroughfare into downtown. Just across this highway lies Liberty City, a historically African American community. Further south lies Little Havana, a widely known historically Cuban community. Lastly, just south of Little Havana and downtown Miami is Coconut Grove, a neighborhood known for its Bahamian population. These and many others exist not only in Miami proper, but make up a large portion of Miami-Dade county itself.

With a population of over 2 million, Miami-Dade County has a significant migrant population. According to 2010 census data, the county has a “foreign-born” population of 51.3 percent.¹³ Miami, the most populous city in the county, has a population of 417,650 with 57.7 percent foreign-born. Although a large portion of the population is foreign-born, this does not take into account the vast number of second and third generation members who help maintain Miami’s reputation as a multi-cultural city. Preservation of language, an important carrier of culture, can hint at how ethnic patterns can carry across generations. Indeed, 77.3 percent of Miami’s population speaks a foreign language at home. Thus, while half of the population is foreign-born, a little over 20 percent more of that group preserves linguistic cultural traditions in their family circles. This speaks to the way Miami represents a city in which preservation of familial culture and indeed transnationalism helps shape the population and thus the local culture of the city.

Miami is both multi-cultural and multi-racial. With a racial demographic of 19.2 percent Black or African American alone, 70.0 percent Hispanic or Latino alone, and 11.9 percent white alone (not Hispanic or Latino) racial tensions have indeed been a significant part of Miami’s history. Within these racial groups are Haitians, who number 123,835 or 29.65 percent of the Miami population. According to Zéphir (2004), in 2004, Little Haiti alone contained “40,000 to 55,000” Haitians (98) although a Miami-Dade County document survey based on 5 year estimates from the 2011 American Community Survey places this number at 32,334 (Little Haiti Targeted Urban Area 2011).

Florida, and in particular, the city of Miami has instead become a site for mostly lower-class Haitians. Indeed, Miami received a huge influx of Haitian “boat people,” or

¹³ All statistics taken from U.S. Census Bureau *State and County Quick Facts* (last updated December 4, 2014) and the *American Community Survey* (2013)

Haitians who took their chances on the open seas on crowded and rickety boats to make the dangerous trip from Haiti to the United States via Miami, Florida. As Zéphir (2004) states, “Miami is considered the city that received (and continues to receive) the largest segment of lower-class Haitians, consisting of poor peasants from *andeyò* (countryside) and urban dwellers who were roaming the streets in search of *lavi* (life)” (97-8). This Miami population continues to grow as more Haitians migrate to Miami, and, older Haitians in New York increasingly decide to join Haitian communities in Florida, and in particular, Miami. To compare, the state of New York has a total Haitian population of 195,441; however, Florida is now home to 431,263 Haitians, and Miami-Dade County alone, as mentioned earlier, is home to 123,835 Haitians (*American Community Survey 2013; U.S. Census 2010* 2014).

For this study, I spent July 2014 living with my family in Miami-Dade County. A short drive into Miami allowed me to visit the LHCSC four days a week as well as conduct interviews there and in the surrounding areas. Mondays through Thursdays each week, I volunteered as an English as a Second Language instructor. Towards the end of the month, I received support from interns who volunteered to help me teach in addition to their own work at the center. We taught classes in the mornings, and I spent the afternoons conducting interviews or walking through Little Haiti observing and taking pictures, some of which are in the first section of this study.

I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with eight Haitian and Haitian-American residents of Miami-Dade County who had either volunteered, worked, or collaborated with the LHCSC to serve Haitian migrant clients. Interviewees identified themselves as “Haitian,” “Haitian diaspora,” “Haitian-American,” and “Second generation

immigrant from Haiti.” I obtained interviews through an informant who shared contact information for potential interviewees. Using these contacts and one referral by a family member, I interviewed four men and four women in order to take into account gendered perceptions of Haitian culture and the history of activism in the community. The sample included men and women with age ranges from early 20s to late fifties (see table 1 on page 59).

The interviews took place in coffee shops, on a local university campus, over the phone, over email, and in a Little Haiti community hub. Interviews ranged from half an hour to an hour and 15 minutes. I intentionally made the interviews “conversations with purpose” (Burgess 1994) in order to ease the conversation and allow interviewees to speak comfortably with me on the topics I introduced. Rather than strictly adhering to the questions, I spoke briefly about my research to interviewees, and then asked interviewees first to tell me a little bit about themselves. Further questions delved into how the interviewees identified themselves culturally or nationally as well as how they maintained and shared their culture through particular practices. Questions were intentionally open-ended so that interviewees could speak freely at length. Many did. Follow-up questions allowed me to request clarification on a topic or continue the conversation on a new topic. Thus, while I had a prepared set of questions, I merely used them to keep conversation going or to respond to experiences the interviewees shared with me. Almost all interviewees were very open to being interviewed, and, upon finding that my parents were Jamaican migrants, many felt more comfortable talking to me. I found this to be the case as well amongst my students at the community center because, as I did not speak the language, many were initially wary of me.

Racial tensions between Haitians, African Americans, Cubans, and Whites have a historic precedent in Miami. As mentioned earlier, many of these communities are adjacent to one another. My appearance as a Black woman who speaks English as her first language likely caused some people in the community to be initially suspicious. Indeed, as I explored the community of Little Haiti, I was certainly observed by locals who may not have recognized me. As a result, I opted to share my own family history as a child of Jamaican migrants who grew up in that culture and who has family in the area. Once I related my own experiences as part of the Caribbean diaspora, many interviewees were more relaxed and even drew parallels between their experiences and their knowledge of Jamaican life and culture. Such cultural parallels, I believe, influenced how open interviewees decided to be with me. My position as a Jamaican-descended female researcher became a source of connection between me and my interviewees and even made conversation-starting that much easier as I shared my own personal histories with the interviewees.

In order to gain access to the site, I visited twice before my official visit in order to complete an application to volunteer. Upon arriving on my first visit, I was struck by the busyness of the place and crowd of men, women, and children walking to different offices, waiting for services, and participating in different programs. In my second visit, I spent four hours in the waiting room in order to finalize my volunteer paperwork. This length of time was simply due to crowds of people in need of immediate services. In spite of the wait, most people seemed relaxed, and if they did not know each other seemed to become familiar quickly, as conversations amongst several people erupted constantly and once quiet and apprehensive people became more talkative and vibrant. At the beginning of month-long site visit for data collection, I met with Sandra, an employee and leader at the community center,

to whom I explained my project, and stated my intentions to volunteer while conducting interviews. She expressed enthusiasm at my decision, and, after I told her of my previous experience as an ESL instructor, she placed me as an ESL instructor for clients. In what became an extremely enjoyable experience, I was able to visit the organization four days a week to teach clients as well as interact with two college interns whose work on political advocacy was incredibly valuable. I developed good friendships with clients, employees, and interns during my month long stay. When I was not volunteering, I explored Little Haiti and the surrounding neighborhoods and conducted interviews in these respective areas.

During my time as a volunteer, I had the opportunity to speak with clients informally, talk with other volunteers and make friendships with employees. Mondays through Thursdays a family member would drop me off at the center at 9 a.m., its opening time. The street outside the center would already be filled with passing cars, and chickens and roosters would wander underneath tropical fruit trees which overshadowed the parking lot. A radio playing Haitian music and sometimes speeches would blast outside a storefront near the center. Clients would wander inside from off the streets as soon as the doors opened. Inside, the daycare would already be boisterous, and new clients would be entering the waiting room to rest and wait to see the secretary in order to request services. When there, I would greet the secretary, a bright young woman who, although busy, would give time and attention to every client while receiving multiple calls from clients over the phone as well as accommodating my requests for the classroom. As mentioned before, two interns helped me and also co-taught some of the English language classes. We would prepare for class at 9:15 and wait for the adult students, predominantly Haitian, to mill into the classroom. During class, I created good friendships with clients who, upon learning I was

Jamaican became much friendlier and shared their experiences with Jamaicans they had met. After class ended at noon, I would chat with the interns and ask what projects they were working on for the center. The center is very much engaged in local and national politics, and many of the projects the interns devoted their work to outside of the classroom involved writing op-eds and drafting reports on the experiences of recent Haitian migrants as well as disenfranchised members of Haitian community in Miami. During my stay, I found out that a worker at the center had gone to an international conference on human rights as a representative of the Haitian migrant community. This kind of activity was common at the center as it served not only as a resource center for newly arrived migrants but also as a political base for happenings in the Haitian American and Haitian community.

At times, I encountered much difficulty in obtaining interviews with members of this organization simply because so many events and projects were occurring that no one had time to sit down for an interview. Nonetheless, I still had the opportunity to speak casually with more people than I could interview formally. Indeed, during my last week, the center became even more abuzz since, as an informant told me, a new boat of Haitians had landed on Miami's shores. As a result, the center would be working to meet the needs of these new migrants and connecting with networks in the Haitian community in Florida to see about reuniting possible family members and identifying those who did not make the crossing.

Volunteering at the center was a rewarding experience as it showed me how well connected this particular ethnic group could be in order to support one another. Clients and workers who were strangers became familiar after short conversations in waiting rooms and classrooms. As a marginalized community in the United States, such informal and formal networks become crucial for forming solidarity and social bonds which can lead to networks

of employment and access to resources. Working as an English as a Second language instructor allowed me one glimpse into the rush of migrant activism and its integral role in maintaining the ethnic and local community.

To obtain interviewees, I made contact with Sandra, an informant and interviewee, who shared a list of potential interviewees and then contacted them regarding my research. Sandra, who is an influential leader within the LHCSC and Haitian community, met with me on my second visit to ask me questions about my project and provide a list of potential contacts for my interviews. At my request, she gave me a list of people she considered of Haitian-descent and who were currently or had been volunteers or interns, participated as part of the board of directors, or worked at the organization. For a number of interviewees, these roles overlapped. Sandra herself provided an interview. I also interviewed a friend of my family who was known to have worked with this organization and other non-profits that address the local Haitian population.

Below, I introduce my interviewees, many of whom have a long history of social activism in Haiti and the United States. All interviewees except for one were born in Haiti and eventually migrated to the United States as young adults. Each sees social activism as part of their work in the Haitian community, but not all interviewees defined their community in the same way. I include how they identify themselves as well as a short personal history and some of the activist work they have done. Biographies are presented in order of when I conducted my interview with each individual.

Table 1: PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Age Range	Role at Center	Length of Interview
Patricia	Early to mid-50s	Volunteer at founding and continued supporter	24 minutes
James	Early to mid-50s	Volunteer	52 minutes
Emmanuel	Early to mid-60s	Volunteer and continued supporter	65 minutes
Frantz	Early to mid-70s	Volunteer at founding and continued supporter	47 minutes
Jean	40s	Worked with the center but at different organization	27 minutes
Nadia	Early 20s	Volunteer	28 minutes
Sandra	Early to mid-50s	Worker at founding and works at center	37 minutes
Simon	Early to mid-70s	Works at center	Corresponded by email

Biographies of Interviewees:

PATRICIA

Patricia, whom I interviewed over the phone, identified herself as Haitian-American. She is a long-time resident of the United States. She migrated to the United States in the 1980s and she immediately started working with Haitian refugees in Miami as they came by boat to escape the Jean-Claude Duvalier dictatorship. She and her husband are actively involved not only with issues related to Haitian migrants but also migrants from other backgrounds. She focused specifically on providing legal services and social services for Haitian refugees. She helped refugees gain asylum, lobbied for equal migrant rights, and assisted those in detention centers. It is through such work that she met Sandra and other Haitian activists whom she fondly sees as great friends and partners in making social change. She still supports projects facilitated by these peers. As she told me, “My philosophy is I can make

the world, I mean...if I can participate in making the world a better place for people to achieve their potential, then it becomes a...better place for myself as well.”

JAMES

James, a middle-aged man who identifies as Haitian American, migrated from Haiti in the late 1980s to New York where he spent almost twenty years working with international NGOs and Haitian community networks in New York. A little over ten years ago, James moved down to Miami for personal and professional reasons. As he says, “Miami, Florida, that is where we have the pioneers of the Haitian community...So I came to lend my support.” Thus, James is part of a larger national network of Haitian activists. He works in city government now, but remains active in the Miami community and is a leader within the Haitian local community and activist network. He is very committed to the LHCSC and provides services at the center often. Using his previous experiences with NGOs, James works to connect the Haitian community in Miami with governmental and non-profit service organizations.

EMMANUEL

Emmanuel, an older man, with a long and storied past of active engagement in Haitian politics in exile, described himself as having two sides and two jobs. According to him, he is both “very public” and “very private,” and while his day job is community action, as he says, he moonlights for his community. Emmanuel is very active in his community and has been politically active since his time in Haiti. As young man in Haiti, Emmanuel actively critiqued the Duvalier dictatorship. For his own safety, he went into exile and moved to

Central America in the late 1970s. From there, he moved to Miami where he formed communities of other Haitian diaspora. He continued his political activity in the United States through critique of the Duvalier dictatorship, supporting Haitian refugees arriving in Miami in the 1980s, and cultivating social awareness amongst the Haitian diaspora. He returned to Haiti after the Duvalier dictatorship ended in 1986, and conducted graduate research on some of the social programs implemented by then President Aristide. He also conducted research on the political attitudes of Haitians and the Haitian diaspora. He collaborates regularly with Sandra on social projects, calling her, himself, and others the pioneers of the Haitian political diasporic movement. He is still involved in the Haitian community and remains active in influencing U.S. policy towards Haiti and Haitian refugees. His latest focus is on how to maintain social activism amongst the next generation of Haitians in the U.S.

FRANTZ

Frantz is an elder, genial and compassionate intellectual and active community leader in Little Haiti. He has passionately fought for the Haitian American community, and, in particular, the community of Little Haiti. Before coming to the United States, Frantz was politically active in Haiti. In the 1960s, he advocated for more education programs for the lower-class and was persecuted for his actions by the Duvalier government. Thus, he migrated to New York in the early 1970s where he supported himself. In the mid-1990s, he relocated to Florida for business reasons, and, moved by the increasing number of Haitian “boat people” arriving on Miami’s shores, opened what has become a Haitian cultural center and gathering place. Concerned about the stigmas surrounding Haitian refugees, Frantz worked to promote Haitian culture not only amongst his community but also with outsiders

who learned to appreciate both Haitian culture and its local language Creole. Frantz works very closely with the LHCSC and was there at its creation in the early 1990s. He is very knowledgeable on the current events within the local Haitian community and politics, and remains engaged in both.

JEAN

Jean, a middle-aged woman with a young family, migrated to the United States as a young adult with her family and considers herself to be Haitian American. She has allegiances to both her Haitian and United States cultures, and, from our conversations, a tension seems to exist between the two. However, as Jean emphasized to me, she picks and chooses from each culture and uses both to create her own identity. Jean is active in a number of non-profits and social projects in both the United States and Haiti. In the past, she collaborated with the LHCSC while working for another non-profit. She remains aware of this organization's happenings since many of the people she provides social services for also receive support from the LHCSC. Indeed, as she said, many organizations which focus on the Haitian community collaborate in their services when needed by clients. As Jean told me, her American and Haitian identities inform how she interacts with people within her community and how she raises her family. She also did not hesitate to point out the injustices she saw within her Haitian culture and issues in the United States. Her ability to pick and choose between two national identities made Jean a prime example of a transnational as she was able to jump between two worlds and carefully critique and draw on both.

NADIA

Nadia is a friendly, sympathetic, and intelligent recent college graduate in her early twenties. Born and raised in Miami, she describes herself as a second generation immigrant from Haiti. She did volunteer work at the LHCSC in order to get closer to her Haitian culture and community. While in the middle of deciding her plans for the future, Nadia desires to return to the organization and volunteer more of her time. She is very proud of her culture and remains socially aware of her position as a Haitian and Black woman in the United States. She does not hesitate to point to gendered and racial discrimination within her Haitian and American communities. Still, she finds immense value in maintaining and learning more about her culture as it serves as a source of strength in the face of discrimination and stereotyping.

SANDRA

Sandra, a peer of Emmanuel and Frantz, is a well-respected leader in the Haitian community in Miami. She has had experience in political campaigns, social movements, and community building. Her work at the LHCSC keeps her busy, but she is well liked by all the clients there. Sandra is a resilient, compassionate woman with a strong sense of social justice for women and their families. Since her arrival in the United States in the early 1980s as a young adult, she has worked with Haitian refugees in Miami and has received support from other well-known leaders in the community. Initially, Sandra focused on helping refugees in detention centers, but later she shifted to social work. Through her job, she began to identify the unique needs of Haitian families new to the United States system. She informed me that the LHCSC was founded to address these needs. According to Sandra, the LHCSC first

focused on supporting Haitian families, but soon spread to provide services for other at-risk groups and also support educational and economic projects in Haiti. Sandra's broader goal in life is to help as many people as she can in order to make the world more peaceful. As she says, "my focus local but my vision is global".

SIMON

Simon is a friendly, hardworking employee at the LHCSC who is well-liked by clients. When asked how he identifies, he describes himself as a philanthropist. I met him during my time volunteering at the organization, and interacted with him multiple times. He is part of many projects the LHCSC provides for the community as well as taking on many leadership roles in the organization. He lived in Haiti in the 1960s and received a professional education there. While there, he worked for a number of international NGOs in Haiti. Here in Miami, he commits time to the LHCSC and other local Haitian community efforts. Although he enjoys his work here, he strongly desires to return to Haiti sometime in the future and become more engaged in local politics in order to better the country.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

*1. Diaspora*¹⁴

The history of Haiti has been fraught with political instability in part because of outside forces aiming to intervene in the political and economic structure of the country. Indeed, even the story of Haiti's inception comes out of struggle and resistance to colonial forms of domination which places it within the Black Atlantic experience (Gilroy 1993). From its early control by imperial France, to more recent times, domination of Haiti has come in the form of multiple occupations and interventions by a number of First World nations. Military regimes led by power hungry Haitian leaders emerge from this long history of occupation and civil wars, and have torn Haiti in a deep way. Such strife has led many Haitians to leave the country in exile or simply to escape. Many identify themselves and their fellow migrants as part of a larger diasporic community. Such a label has had both positive and negative connotations since such flight was not only deemed a sign of betrayal by despotic heads of state such as Duvalier but also a sign of hope for families and friends left behind who receive financial and sometimes political support from afar. People of the diaspora could be viewed as having a desire for a place where they can truly feel at home.

Emmanuel,¹⁵ a volunteer at the LHCSC and Haitian community leader, related to me the mixed feelings of the diaspora, in particular those who had been active in resisting Duvalier from afar. A refugee from Haiti who came during the turbulent times of the Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier dictatorship, Emmanuel takes his diaspora status as a source of

¹⁴ Diaspora has become a monolithic term which has come to mean many things and covers many types of experiences. Cohen ([2002] 2008) argues that such a term requires more specificity. However, it is the clearest analytical term to date for describing this particular experience. As Cohen argues, future work can and should nuance this term.

¹⁵ All names have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewee.

pride even when, at the time, the government was deriding people in the diaspora for leaving. He says:

Those of us who are in exile, the Duvalier regime give us a name...that is very ugly. It is like we are group to be disposed of, and the, they would call us *kamoken*. *Kamoken* in creole mean[t] that we were “bad peel.” That is uh, that is uh hard to spell it. So in the, in the cultural things, people that were anti-Duvalier were going to be called *kamoken*, but when I come here, another thing that I did was using that word to mean some--it means a group of people who were something good for the homeland. And the--in the festivals and the saints and cultural things, I always claim those who are my friend, I always claim that we are the *kamoken*. (Emmanuel: 2)

Thus, Emmanuel already positions his diasporic stance as one that involves political activism. He resists the negative connotation of his exile and turns it into a collective identity and motivation to advocate for Haiti. Rather than a “bad peel,” the diaspora is “something good for homeland,” and indeed, Emmanuel, throughout the interview, told me of the actions he had taken before and after he ended his exile and then when he hopped back and forth between Haiti and the United States. Not only did he protest President Jean Claude Duvalier’s government policies in Haiti which hurt Haitians. He also challenged those policies in the United States, such as treatment of Haitian refugees compared to Cubans in the 1980s, which hurt Haitian transplants.

Active in the politics of Haiti from the time of president for life Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier to President Aristide, Emmanuel points to the tensions diaspora felt as they wanted to change the country of Haiti for the better but found that even with all their work Haiti may not ever become the kind of nation many of them hoped it would become. In describing what happened in the diaspora after Duvalier’s overthrow, Emmanuel talks about the struggles of the diaspora to influence Haiti in the aftermath.

We did not value good enough in term of what Haiti would be like after Duvalier...in the meantime, time passed and the country has changed, the people have changed, and the people going back some of them go back to have their own

experience and many of them they are disappointed and disillusioned and they come back to the diaspora because what they are hoping, what they are wishing, we could not realize it in Haiti. I'm assuming that Haiti--they were not ready yet for Haiti or Haiti was not ready yet for them. (Emmanuel: 3)

At first Emmanuel, groups himself with the diaspora and describes how, after focusing so much on Duvalier, they did not have a plan for Haiti after his overthrow. In relating his and his fellow compatriots' experiences in the diaspora, Emmanuel points to the longing inherent in definitions of the diaspora. Although Haiti as a country still exists, for the diaspora, the country they left and the country they desired to see through the work of their political activism from afar was not realized. In this way, what once was a short term migration becomes a long term feeling of displacement from a country that still exists in place but is an unfulfilled memory or idealized dream. Such a stance leads the diaspora to keep transnational ties but from a distance until perhaps the country of their imagining can exist again. This sense of ambivalent longing emerges in how this diasporic community views itself and the next generation growing up in the United States. Emmanuel says:

There is a disconnect within the Haitian leadership about where they would like to see Haiti and how its problems can be solved, and the way that we see our presence here in the diaspora...we share advice for other people to follow because...we are still a young community and...we face a lot of challenges [and] a lot of hardship. (Emmanuel: 9)

Emmanuel points to the challenges of not only finding ways to support and rebuild Haiti, but also, what to do in the meantime as they choose to stay and develop a diasporic community. What emerges is that the people of the diaspora have a heightened sense of activism since they feel a sense of responsibility for Haiti based on a transnational allegiance. However, since they have stayed abroad, they also find connections with those Haitians who migrated later because of similar hardships. Indeed, Emmanuel, who is active with both the LHCSC and the community, points to a strong sense of responsibility for the new community of

Haitians living in the United States fleeing from similar problems within the Haitian nation-state that he and his fellow members of the diaspora were unable through their political efforts to solve.

However, in spite of Emmanuel's sense of complex disillusionment with the role of the Haitian diaspora and Haiti's future, a number of Haitians abroad argue for continued contact and connection with Haiti. Even those interviewed who initially told me that they consider the United States their home, or that they do not acknowledge national affiliations, still emphasized a connection to Haiti directly or indirectly. Some use advocacy and philanthropy towards Haitians in the United States and in Haiti as a way to stay connected to their original homeland or culture. They express their transnationalism in ways that do not simply mean remittances or other forms of informal networks. Some see their work in helping Haitians abroad as part of how they can help Haitians in the United States. Ultimately, many express some form of connection to Haiti through social activism or a simple desire to give back to their cultural community.

James, a Haitian migrant whose first stop in the United States was not Florida but New York, resides in Miami where he advocates for Haitians and volunteers his time at the LHCSC. He asserts that he does not see national boundaries or affiliations. Indeed, he says: "Yeah, one would say that I am Haitian, but when I'm working I'm not Haitian. I'm someone who lives in Miami. I don't have a country, I see people. So that's how it is for me" (James: 2). He proposes a more global sense of community and says that he applies such a perspective to his work.

However, he is very active in the Haitian community and is always available to give his expertise at the LHCSC when needed. When I asked him about his thoughts on Little

Haiti, he pointed to the way events in Haiti spilled into the daily lives of those living in the United States. He cites the ousting of Baby Doc Duvalier as one such example. When he describes how Haitians and Haitians abroad celebrated, he makes an interesting observation about the enduring transnational connection that exists between Haitians abroad and in the United States. He includes himself in this observation and thus points to the role Haiti plays for him too. When the people of Haiti succeeded in ousting Duvalier, James describes the patriotism that emerged in the people and how it spread throughout Haiti. He says:

The first thing is that 1986—after the Haitian revolution—not the Haitian revolution—after they ousted the president in Haiti, in 1986, what we did in Haiti was try to rebuild the country or give, giving back identity to the country in our minds, to remember where we come from, who we are as a nation, as a people, a group of young people decided to reorganize the local communities, the neighborhoods, started cleaning up the places, bring flowers to each house, and people felt like the patriotism building back in them, painting the houses red and blue—that started in Haiti. Instead of burning the tires, we painted them and made like flowerpots with them, you know, instead of using it to kill someone, we used it to advance the place. Using our imagination, turning our frustrations into a celebration. (James: 6)

He talks about the cohesiveness that emerged among the people when they resisted the leaders of the state. He emphasizes the people's separation from the state and self-identification as the nation of Haiti. This concept becomes transnational when James continues,

And what happens now see, in Little Haiti they are doing the same things, because the same um--I would say, you know, life doesn't stop wherever you are, we are always connected. Wherever you are you're still connected to your country or where you come from, so that's why they had houses painted in red and blue. (James: 6)

Here he reflects on how people remain transnationally connected to events happening in their countries of origin. In particular, he points to how he and his fellow Haitians remained closely connected to events in their home country. Not only that, but also, such a connection

reestablishes that Haitian cultural perception of embodying the nation amongst the class of Haitians who suffered under the domination of the state.

In Haiti, the local people outside of the state elite conceive of themselves as representing the true citizenry of Haiti, distinguished by its inception through revolutionary struggle for freedom and personhood. Thus, such actions reiterate the impact of identification with that history of struggle, and, as James connects it to similar happenings in Little Haiti, he shows that such national pride does not die. Indeed, this pride and celebration alongside those in Haiti shows that political struggle keeps such a transnational connection alive. The ousting of Duvalier in 1986 still has an impact on James. For him, such an event points to how a transnational connection is never diminished and that this transnational political awareness and activity becomes part of everyday life.

Jean, a woman organizer who has worked alongside the LHCSC to support the Haitian population, provided a more hybrid explanation of her transnationalism. Initially, when I interviewed her, she critiqued those who held closely to their Haitian culture and identity and offered her own definition of identity as a “merging” in which she picked the aspects of each culture she preferred and made them her own. At first, I was surprised by her reticence to fully embrace her Haitian side. She emphasized both aspects of her identity: American by citizenship and Haitian by blood, saying it would be “unfair” to only see herself as Haitian. As she says:

I consider myself Haitian American. And simple reason why: I’m Haitian first of all by blood and the fact that I live here and reside here and I do everything here and I, and I adopt the citizenship,...the American citizenship the day that I took the oath so it would be pretty much unfair. It would be pretty much unfair to say I consider myself Haitian and not Haitian American when I literally on oath said I’m becoming American so I think it would be safe to say I’m a Haitian American proudly. (Jean: 1)

Unlike Emmanuel who sees his identity as part of the diaspora and thus invested heavily in the welfare of his country, Jean feels that her obligation is to her new country. In some ways, her official citizenship as a resident of the United States translates into a sense of responsibility and obligation which she needs to maintain. She takes these obligations seriously such that tensions emerge between her allegiances to Haiti, her country of birth, and the United States, where she has had to swear an oath confirming her citizenship. As a result, she focuses her energies mainly on her own work and how it will impact herself and her family.

Initially, I thought that she had had no ties to Haiti based on her prioritizing her immediate family, local community, and personal happenings. However, in the course of our conversation, it came to light that she also maintained ties to Haiti through Haiti-based organizations in which she is heavily invested. She repeatedly goes to Haiti not for cultural or social reasons, but simply to focus on her humanitarian work. In fact, she says that working from the United States serves as an inhibition to her work there. As she says:

Too much politics, too much law, too much. Here in Haiti, you go and you do what you gotta do... at the end of the day, I know as long as you know what you're doing is from the heart and you're not doing no harm, it's good. (Jean: 7)

Thus, her connection to Haiti remains. Earlier in the interview, she reflected on the positives and negatives of working in the United States to reach Haitian migrants and the struggle and working within grant requirements and bureaucracy. For her, aiding Haitians works best when she is able to go directly to Haiti itself and help people there. While holding onto her identity as an American citizen, Jean still takes the time to return to Haiti for the benefit of other Haitians outside her familial network who need support.

The people described in these paragraphs were born in Haiti and thus had a tangible history and connection with the country of Haiti. However, one can wonder how this transnationalism plays over generations. A theme which emerged amongst a few of the older interviewees was their concern with the generation of Haitians born in the United States who may decide either to stay within their community or to branch out. Those who talked about the next generations hope that the younger generations will keep their Haitian culture alive and contribute to the growth of the Haitian diaspora and Little Haiti. Nadia, a Haitian American born in the United States, volunteered at the LHCSC in order to “engage with [her] community” (Nadia: 3). Throughout the interview, she expressed her desire to learn more about her Haitian culture through service. She describes what many children of immigrants feel: the desire to make their family’s sacrifice worthwhile by being successful and giving back in some way. For her, this desire translates into service towards her fellow Haitians. She says:

I think as you, as a second generation, you see the sacrifices your parents make, and so as you’re going through college, as you’re going through your education, getting a job, you want to make it. There’s a pressure to make it worth it: their experiences, their struggles to get you a better life. You wanna make sure that, you know, you’re successful, you know, to just give back to your community, and I think that’s kinda what I wanna do. I don’t know how yet--still working on that. But I would definitely want to give back to the Haitian community, probably be the Haitian American community. (Nadia: 5)

Here, Nadia expresses the concerns of many second generation children who want their parents’ approval, but she also connects this feeling to her cultural community in the United States. Perhaps this speaks to the role that assimilation and continued migration plays in influencing transnational ties. These effects may weaken connections to the homeland and close off transnational ties. Earlier in the interview, Nadia had talked about her trips to Haiti

and about her desire to learn more about her culture. She pointed to the fact, however, that as more and more of her family moved to the United States, such trips will likely diminish.

Sandra, a Haitian community leader and full-time worker at the LHCSC saw the work she did with Haitians abroad as closely tied to the work she did with Haitians living in the United States, and as part of a global framework. Indeed, later in the interview, she describes her own visions as global and the work she does in the United States as interconnected with her work in Haiti. Sandra, who came to the United States as a young adult and immediately began working with Haitian “boat people” while settled in Florida, remains engaged in the Haitian community, and indeed, her name is usually coupled with a nod of respect because of her deep involvement with the community.

For her, a transnational or global perspective as she describes it necessitates her involvement with Haiti. She says, “Well, we don’t work in silos because we believe that in order to help people here, *we must*--we must intervene in Haiti (Sandra: 5). Sandra sees the LHCSC as facilitating such transnational connections through the implementations of programs which support Haitian economic and social development of its people. Her vision is indeed global and, for her, the LHCSC’s goal is to tackle the roots of problems in Haiti which lead to people crossing in boats to the United States. Like Emmanuel, who sees Haiti’s problems as something he and the diaspora must grapple with, Sandra also contends that her work with the LHCSC must necessarily help those in Haiti. She says:

If and when you go to the roots of the problem, you’ll see all the connections, you know, people are here because we were in their countries, because we’ve developed policy that worked to the detriment of their, of these families, of the farmers, and that is why they are forced to come. So in order for us to change things, we need to go to the roots of these problems. Thus, our intervention in Haiti, you know, and our focus to always go to the roots of the problems. (Sandra: 6)

Here she identifies the connections between the United States' involvement and the deterioration of Haiti. However, she uses her position in the United States then to dismantle those effects. Her work constitutes her as transnationally socially active. While the LHCSC works with Haitian migrants in the United States, it also works to eradicate those circumstances which force Haitians to become migrants or refugees in the first place. Her work keeps her not only involved with the Haitian diaspora but also in making sure that other Haitians can avoid problems leading to migration. Her work then may allow Haitian migrants in the United States to return to Haiti permanently as the situation in their home nation changes.

In this way, Sandra points to the value of maintaining transnational connections as it creates positive solutions in the homeland and facilitates the positive growth and support for those fellow nationals who stay home. However, what is interesting here is that Sandra does not simply point to transnational connections of support to help Haiti. She points to the global reach of sociopolitical problems which push people to become transnationals. Rather than emphasizing her own diaspora status, Sandra points here to the policies of nation-states which create a diaspora and uses her status as such to help challenge such detrimental aspects of globalization.

Such a perspective is indicative of others who, because of their status as Haitian refugees and a marginalized migrant group in Miami, have no choice but to be aware of their actions as both transnational and political. To be part of the Haitian diaspora in Miami means they must contend with the fact that they may never go home to the dream of Haiti that they strive for through their advocacy for Haiti in the United States. While for one, this causes disillusionment or becomes a source of contention, others see their placement in the

United States as an opportunity to do the most good where they are. The people I spoke to saw their social advocacy as important to their connection to the Haitian community. Still, many saw their work as a way to understand how their lives as migrants have positioned their fellow Haitians with a tenuous existence in the United States. This allowed them to sympathize and extend support to other migrants and groups of other ethnicities through broader advocacy and understanding the true nature of global events which influence migration.

1.1 Diaspora and the Black Atlantic

When exploring the experiences of the Haitian diaspora, one must also place this experience within the larger Black experience, and in particular, the Black Atlantic.

Interviewees James, Emmanuel, Sandra and Nadia brought up their experiences or thoughts on the relations between the African American and Haitian community in Miami. Race, and in particular Blackness, is a salient issue in Miami-Dade County where, in a population of over 2 million, Blacks have consistently made up 15-20 percent of the population since the early 20th century, and Miami itself has been wracked by three race riots in 1980, 1982, 1989 respectively (Croucher 1997: 27, 46-7). From these interviews, the subject of who counts as Black was a source of contention and urgency as such definitions affected how resources were allocated to each community by the state. In addition, such differences influenced how these groups, who can be included within the global Black diasporic community termed the Black Atlantic, collaborated with one another on issues of social justice.

Interviewees pointed to the ways in which United States culture pitted African Americans against Haitians in order to accumulate various forms of capital from these

marginalized populations. For example, Emmanuel points to an instance in which the state redefined Blackness in such a way that disadvantaged non-African American members of the Black Atlantic. He describes how census data misrecognized Haitians within the U.S.

Black population. He says:

In 1990 after we analyzed the census data for the Haitian community, we quickly discovered there was a discrepancy in the way that the US government was counting Haitians. All over the system there [are] complications. Even though we are Black--or, even though our skin is black--we are not considered Black. (Emmanuel: 6)

Here he points to how he feels as if he were outside of the Black identified community in the United States. In this instance, it is the state that causes such exclusion. Emmanuel explains in more detail later that because there was no distinguishing between African Americans and Haitians in the census, the African American community would receive government grants while the Haitian population--invisible within the Black category on the census--would receive comparably less support. Emmanuel says:

When Haitians are figuring out the census form, they do not give you...an option to identity your ethnicity, and today we are still fighting with them....When you see the census form you see that they subdivide the white category....They subdivide the Hispanic category. But the Black category....just Black!....My idea is there was something fundamentally wrong with that concept because....they are trying to protect the African American community in terms of their numbers because the government grants are used to address poverty issues. (Emmanuel: 7)

Thus, for Emmanuel, the census served as a place where his Blackness and unique ethnic background were challenged and thus disadvantaged in regards to resources for his community. Such institutional discrepancies emphasize that Blackness is indeed a slippery term, and, can be used to cause divides within communities. Emmanuel's experiences point to how Blackness can have both individual and institutional meanings with serious implications for communities struggling to survive in the United States.

For James, real estate is a big concern as many impoverished Haitian migrants have been pushed out of housing to make room for corporate development. He ties this to race when he says:

You know everyone is welcome in Little Haiti, but the thing is that things are changing. Real estate is getting underway. Developers are getting in. People who want to make more money where they can find a foreclosure house for less money and those who also have that little thing in their mind that they're superior because they are lighter skin than someone else begin to push those Haitians out because sometimes you hear: "you're nothing." African Americans: "you're not Black, man, you're Haitian American." So they tell us that. (James: 5)

Here James parallels competition for housing with racial discrimination. While he does point to ways outside developers push out Haitians for their properties, he argues that it is not only a racial phenomenon but an ethnic phenomenon where Haitians are differentiated from Black people in the United States.

However, within these differences Haitian community activists would point to those times when leaders in the African American community would collaborate with the leaders in the Haitian community if only tenuously. As Emmanuel says,

Nothing has been handed to us on a fair way from immigration benefits to benefits in everything we have. The community had to fight making protest after protest, making demand after demands and also sometimes compromising with the African American community as well. (Emmanuel: 6)

Here, Emmanuel calls such collaboration in struggle a compromise. Such a term points to a possibly strained relationship with the African American community who are seen as different but useful at times for political solidarity.

Indeed, Emmanuel recalls a particular time when an African American governmental official offered her support to Haitians living under her jurisdiction in a policy issue regarding Haitian refugees. As Emmanuel recounts:

She met with us and...show[ed] us the name of the game. She let us know that struggle, it's not her struggle. It's not her personal struggle. She said, "I don't care, but however, being you in my district, I understand that I have to play my role as a legislator but I'm going to tell you if you are interested, this would be a rule you should know it."...She said that "if you can create a groundswell on the steps of the US congress to get a big, big demonstration showing, make the people think twice before they say no to you, I'll be there with you to show you the way. But don't think I'm always going to be at the front line to do it for you!" So basically that was a big challenge that they put before us. (Emmanuel: 8)

Here, Emmanuel recounts a time he and his group receive practical advice from a member of the African American community; however, Emmanuel recognizes that her advice also serves as a challenge to create a large, strong movement that can get the attention of political leaders. This leader speaks from the history of African American movements in the United States, and perhaps her practical advice speaks to struggle involved in Black movements for social justice. However, this advice comes from a position of ultimate distance, for the legislator emphasizes that the Haitian struggle is "not her struggle" (Emmanuel: 8).

Emmanuel, who earlier mentioned his first encounter with difference within the Black community, provides a strong example of the ways in which members of the overall Black Atlantic do not necessarily always have a consistent sense of unity and commonality. Different histories and experiences may cause these divides, but as can be seen in this case, relationships and bands of solidarity are formed, at times, provisionally.

Still, another case of solidarity with the African American community emerged in the interviews through Sandra who cited a governmental leader as a "mentor" who helped her as a new refugee to the United States and supported her social projects in the Haitian community early on. As she says: "He saw what I was trying to do, appreciated it and named me on the board" (Sandra: 2). Sandra's mentor was a prominent African American government leader. While Sandra did not emphasize that her mentor was African American,

she saw him as a support and mentor while she was building up her community projects in the Haitian community. In this way, Sandra was able to bridge the ethnic divide between communities to receive support.

In addition, Nadia, a first generation Haitian in her early twenties, provides an example of how such ethnic differences between Black Atlantic communities change over generations. In an earlier quote, Nadia emphasizes the importance of her Haitian culture to her. However, she also includes the commonalities between herself and those of the Black Atlantic across nationalities. In emphasizing the importance of holding onto culture, she says:

You know, your culture kinda keeps you grounded. Because when you hear all of these negative stereotypes--not just about being Haitian, just being Black in America, in general--you need something to keep you grounded, you need something to have pride in. (Nadia: 5)

For Nadia, negative stereotypes surrounding Haitians and African Americans are equally destructive, and for her, both need the support which comes with cultural grounding. While Nadia only mentions such a commonality once, it provides a possibility for more questions on how Black identity changes over generations. What would become important in this context is how such shifts in identity and possible unity around a common experience can later translate into political solidarity and shared social movements. As can be seen from these responses, much more still needs to be explored in terms of how Black identity in the United States is defined individually and regulated institutionally. Such codifying can influence how Black and non-Black identified people of color live and interact with one another in shared spaces.

Even with these points of cooperation between African American and Haitian Blacks, the divisive forms of identity formation still take a toll on members of the Black

Atlantic. Emmanuel relates a personal story about how such ethnic differences led to differential access to resources and feelings of exclusion. Relating an incident which happened to him when he applied for funding for an academic program, Emmanuel expresses how the negative personal impact of being differentiated from Blacks in the United States affected him. He says:

I said “you know, I am interested in applying to that same scholarship you have for the Black students.” and then the person that were registering, was, “you know, this scholarship is not for you!” I said “Why?” [He] said that even though that thing mentioned Black students, what they mean is African American. That day, that was the most embarrassing day for me in my whole life. I sensed there was something fundamentally wrong with that--with that thing. I felt properly that I was being discriminated against and I could not understand that this was for that. It’s like...being caught suddenly into something you don’t understand and there’s nobody available. So it took me years, it took me time to--it took me a lot of time--to grasp the dimension of that problem and also [it is] so hard to fix it. (Emmanuel: 6-7)

The dismay and confusion Emmanuel feels at such treatment emphasizes the complexity of racial identification and discrimination. What understandings of racial differences sometimes cannot account for are these cultural and class differences which make up for unique experiences within Black diasporic communities. Here, Emmanuel expresses feelings of discrimination based not on racial but ethnic difference even though he may share similar economic hardships as those the scholarship requires. Emmanuel feels his own identification with the collective, Black diasporic community challenged here where he felt no different from other forms of Black ethnic groups.

Within the Black Atlantic and indeed any racial or ethnically-centered group, differences of experience and identification will necessarily arise and they need to be both acknowledged and accepted. Here, it is as if Emmanuel is abruptly confronted with the ephemerality of racial identity. While he may identify as Black or Haitian in these instances, what racial and ethnic identities mean can and is determined not only by Black people

themselves but those institutional authorities who can use such identities to both include and exclude members. This exclusion has been used to justify unequal treatment of communities and keep these groups continually in competition with one another instead of forming solidarities based on similar experiences of marginalization. To emphasize these differences can thwart social cohesion and political solidarity, and justify unequal treatment by the state or corporate entities.

James and Emmanuel spoke at length about the issue of relations between African American Blacks and Haitian Blacks, but the issue of race subtly arose in other interviews. From these statements, one can see that the issue of Black racial relations remains a palpable source of contention within the Haitian and Black diaspora and thus remains an important subject of study. Interviewees, who see social activism as part of their own culture, were willing to create alliances of varying degrees with the African American community in Miami. However, such alliances were tinged with underlying discontent as there existed a constant competition for government resources. Miami has historically been a diverse city, and, as a result, has been wracked by racialized tensions and conflict which have pitted African Americans, Whites, Cubans, and Haitians against each other. Indeed, such competition has, at times, put different ethnic groups within the Black Atlantic against one another. In this case, African Americans and Haitian Americans have found themselves at odds in claiming social support. Still, within these tensions, similarity of struggle has allowed members of the Black diasporic communities of African Americans and Haitian Americans to find common ground in the space of community activism. Interviewees pointed out the unique struggles of Haitians within the United States Black population but also emphasized the times when they were able to cooperate to achieve similar goals.

Regardless of their perception by the homeland or their country of residence, some of the diaspora see their resettling abroad as permanent; however, their connection to Haiti and its people is nonetheless still strong. Of the people interviewed, some see their position as Haitian American as more of a permanent status. Others see their diaspora status as something which allowed them to straddle both the United States and Haiti in order that they can continue to help Haiti. Some view this double allegiance as necessary to benefit Haiti while others are more ambivalent in that they yearned to go home, but are unsure of what kind of home they would be returning to and whether their efforts could really help Haiti. Some even renounce their familial connections to Haiti, but find comfort and gratification in helping other Haitians there. Others, who were not born in Haiti but who grew up within the culture find that building a connection to Haiti not only helps them find their Haitian identity but enables them to fend off negative stereotypes of Haitians and help others to discover a more positive side of Haiti. In addition, these conceptions of identity became complicated when pitted against and joined with the African American experience. How Haitians interacted with other members of the Black Atlantic diaspora was influenced negatively by state and local policies and yet when circumstances necessitated their solidarity for political purposes, members of the African American and Haitian Black diaspora would make temporary and sometimes more permanent alliances. All in all, from these interviews I found that being in the Haitian diaspora was not a simple state of being. It involves not only a maintenance of allegiances to the homeland but also the refashioning of that connection to suit one's particular understanding of diasporic identity and transnational philanthropy.

2. *Culture*

Culture is an important aspect of maintaining transnational connections as it works to form lasting bonds between people in the home and resident countries through ritual, memory, and community events. However, as these transnational connections transform into sites of diasporic community, the culture may change and hybridize to accommodate experiences gained from both the home and receiving country. Marginalization and exclusion in the sending and receiving country through state policies can also politicize this diasporic culture and create avenues to critique both political regimes. In these interviews, diaspora became a site for forming more hybrid understandings of Haitian culture and for challenging negative traditions of gender embedded within their culture.

James and Jean both engaged with the Haitian community as volunteers and social workers. Out of the interviewees, they stood out for their truly diasporic stance on Haitian identity and culture. By holding onto their Haitian identities in different ways and catering to the Haitian community, both saw their stance on Haitian culture in a more hybrid way. Each pushed the boundaries on what constitutes the nation and saw it as intrinsic to their identities, and one, James, as intrinsic to Haitian identity itself.

When asked how he sees his community, James points to how community is never limited by national borders. He argues that Haiti's unique beginnings stemmed from a group of people not tied to national origins. He says:

We have a group of slaves who decided that no more is no more, no more slavery. So...they stood up, but they weren't the only ones to stand up. And when they began, they were not Haitians. They were not. ...Some of them ...were from Africa, so they were called African descent. And some of them came from Jamaica and other places, so they were not Haitians. So a group of people decided they no longer wanted to be in slavery, so they decided to free themselves. Then after that, you had to have...identification, so they brought back the name Haiti. (James: 3)

Here, James points to the diasporic origins of Haiti itself, and indeed, many colonized Caribbean countries. African individuals sold into slavery and torn from their original cultural and national groups automatically make up a diaspora during this violent imperial past. However, what is distinct about Haiti is that because of its slave rebellion and victory, these once multinational fighters had to turn their diasporic origins into a nation. According to James, this original diasporic identity has never left. Indeed, it informs how he views nations and nationality as a construction used as a tool to form unity. Because of his history as a descendant of Black Atlantic freedom fighters, he can articulate this understanding of nationhood and thus define culture as something dynamic and not tied to physical place. He uses this understanding in his social practices by not limiting his social work to only his community. As he says, “The community is like every one of us living. There is no community without you and I. That’s what I say. A broader way” (James: 4). He sees his community, and thus those he serves, as anyone who has need. Therefore, his notion of community becomes broadened because of his personal experiences volunteering with people of all national backgrounds. When asked if he sees his community as beyond Haiti, he points to how Haiti itself originated from various members of the African diaspora.

Jean, a transnational who claims both her United States and Haitian identity, sees her identity as more of a hybrid “merging” and thus, like James understands culture to be more dynamic. As she says, “I have the Haitian background, and I have the American background, and I take both culture and I merge them and make up into something that I want” (Jean: 1). Indeed, Jean strongly critiqued certain aspects of Haitian culture and argued that she wanted to pick and choose which practices she liked and pass them on to her children. She even sees this hybridity as something which will continue onto the next

generation of the Haitian American diaspora. She says: “They grow up with what I taught them as a child and then they’re gonna merge it to what they know--what this culture bring them--and they’re going to merge it to something different” (Jean: 4). For Jean, such hybrid, transnational practices are important to her identity and what culture she will pass down to her children.

Indeed, Jean feels strongly that this hybridity should be a part of cultural maintenance. When I asked her about those transnational migrants who see maintaining Haitian culture as more important to identity, she tells me that it is not good since it limits one’s ability to critique the culture and be aware of its shortcomings. She also argues that cultural preservation through ethnic enclaves is also damaging as they become insular and less welcoming. She also cites the reputation of crime in Little Haiti as an example of a deterrent.

I think the people there could have made the city better. I think the way they treat the city as if that was their own little community, they own their little piece of Miami um the same thing with Little Havana. The Cubans treat it as if it was their own little um piece of Cuban place. I think they could have increased it a little better. They could have made it more appealing, more welcoming and then [there is] the crime. (Jean: 2)

However, true to her hybrid outlook, Jean still finds reason to value Little Haiti although she sees it as too insular a cultural enclave. She continues, “Now I’m not saying that’s what it is, I mean I’ve never been robbed, I mean I worked there for many years and I never I mean, I felt at home. But that’s the face” (Jean: 2). Thus, Jean provides a strong example of how her transnationalism creates for her a hybrid cultural identity which not only allows her to find affinity with her Haitian background and community but also allows her to be critical of it and not become completely absorbed by cultural insularity. Indeed, James’ retelling of Haitian history allows him to value Haitian culture without being exclusionary in how he

deals with others. Both James and Jean situate the experience of Haitian transnational culture as a unique form of identity.

Culture thus becomes an amorphous aspect of identity that can be merged, critiqued, expanded, and reoriented as needed. Indeed, many of the interviewees pointed to the ways in which culture can be utilized as a social tool of empowerment, group solidarity, and a way to reach out to others. Culture has the ability to both include the seemingly authentic and exclude those with difference; however, culture within the politically active diaspora can be shaped and reshaped to suit the needs of an individual, a group, and a movement.

Patricia, a Haitian transnational who worked with the LHCSC and other organizations from their beginnings in Miami and beyond spoke to how community building came with her social work and its impact. She says: “The rewarding part was...the relationships that I made. Know[ing] people, getting to, being able to participate, and be meaningful. That had an impact on people’s lives--a positive impact--and...creating bonds with the community” (Patricia: 3). For Patricia, who had earlier told me of her initial engagement with the Haitian community, such work allowed her to build relationships and get close to the Haitian community. She is also aware of how the migrant community, although like any other typical migrant group, must still work together and be politically involved as a group. While she says “I don’t know that it is any different from any other migrant community--that’s a *new* community,” she later adds that “at election time they are very involved” and even repeats later “I think they are becoming more aware that they have to get involved” (Patricia: 3). She sees a connection here between political and cultural solidarity. This theme arose amongst a number of interviewees who saw a close connection between cultural solidarity and political involvement.

Emmanuel, a long-time activist, describes his use of radio to spread political messages as part of his way of forming community with other Haitians. He says:

I start[ed] to create my own space in Miami and then I became involved with the radio station... We just call it “club cultural.” It was made of...anti-Duvalier people and...maybe we were the only radio station that was taking a tone, an anti-Duvalier, an anti-dictatorship tone. And in the end...that program became very popular.
(Emmanuel: 2)

Emmanuel here uses the medium of radio programs labeled as cultural in order to engage in transnational political activism. This activism galvanizes Haitians in the United States and gives them a venue for voicing criticisms against a dictatorship in their home country.

Culture works as a way of not only uniting the Haitian diaspora against oppressive government in the homeland but also empowering Haitians as they are subjected to marginalization by developers and competing people groups in the United States. Many of those interviewed describe such ostracism and how they used cultural expression, the enclave of Little Haiti, and social solidarity to fight back.

For example, Frantz, a leader in the Haitian community and well-known source for Haitian culture describes how development has made vulnerable the cultural enclave of Little Haiti. He sees the threat of outside development as a threat to his cultural identity. He says, “they are trying...to buy properties and houses, you know, in order to push forward...but the point is, you know, can we keep our identity? Can we keep this as Little Haiti?” (Frantz: 4). According to Frantz, Little Haiti as a cultural space is synonymous with Haitian identity. Such a parallel becomes even more apparent when Frantz breaks down how Haitian migrants in Little Haiti have in terms of resources. As Nadia explained to me, Little Haiti is a first place of residence for many Haitian migrants, so the vulnerability of Haitians is that much more acute there as these new migrants struggle to find a place to survive.

For Frantz then, Little Haiti represents more than just a town. Rather, for Haitians whose limited resources provide a tenuous existence, culture is the only thing of value they can truly claim that they own. He says:

We can count on our fingers how many Haitians...are property owners in Little Haiti so therefore we are very weak--in a weak position. All we have is our culture. All we have [is] the history of...a group of people that have settled in this area called Lemon City...but now... it's not citrus, it's people! It's people living here! (Frantz: 4)

Little Haiti thus becomes extremely valuable as it constitutes a source of refuge for those who have limited material wealth to claim.

James, Nadia, and Frantz also point to how Little Haiti and Haitian culture work to safeguard them from stereotypes and structural inequalities which disadvantage them in the United States. While Haitians have a long history of migration to the United States, the influx of Haitian refugees to Miami from the 1980s onward put them in the public eye where they were seen negatively as boat people. Characterizations as backward, poor, carriers of HIV/AIDS, and the phrasing of Haiti as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere caused many Haitian migrants to suffer discrimination, persecution, exploitation, and ostracism. Activists in New York and Miami responded to such characterizations by supporting Haitian migrants in Miami through social services and cultural programs which not only boosted self-esteem but worked to put Haitians in a positive light culturally and to share their culture with outsiders. While much of this more explicit criticism of Haitians happened in the past, the stigma still remains. As a result, many see cultural practices as a way to secure Haitians' place in the United States. James, who came from New York to Florida to support the Haitian community leaders in Miami, describes the construction of Little Haiti as a response to such ostracism. He says:

When Haitians could not go to a store without being sprayed because they smell, when Haitians were being denied...an apartment because they are Haitian...when Haitians were being denied good positions because they don't speak English,...they had to find a place to survive...they built Little Haiti. (James: 5)

Here, James points to the importance Little Haiti holds for Haitians, as Frantz so poignantly describes earlier. Both claiming and celebrating one's culture and having a space to express it is the only bulwark that marginalized communities have against discrimination and economic stratification. Frantz echoes the importance of building a cultural presence as a result of such treatment when he concludes: "therefore we are trying to build to build a monument, you know, to codify our culture and, and our history.... therefore...we're here to stay, and the Haitians are making big progress" (Frantz: 5). Frantz makes the point that since Haitians are there to stay in spite of resistance, making a space for themselves becomes important.

Nadia and Frantz point to the importance of connecting to and expressing their culture in order to dispel stereotypes and educate outsiders. Nadia, a young second generation Haitian American, points to how stereotypes of Haitians affect her and how she combats them by learning more about her Haitian culture in response to those ignorant of its richness. In discussing the importance of maintaining her Haitian culture, she says:

I think it's important as a Haitian because you have all these negative stereotypes about Haitians from people who don't know the culture. Like, we are the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, so when you hear that people have this idea of what it means to be Haitian like, I cringe, well, I shouldn't, but I cringe when someone says like, "oh yeah! I just came back from doing missionary work in Haiti" because it's making poverty the main issue instead of "hey! I visited the beaches or they had great food"....so I think it's important for me to know the Haitian aspect, Haitian culture and my American culture, I guess, and how they interact. (Nadia: 2)

Here, Nadia feels the negative effects of stereotypes even when people claim to be providing aid to Haiti. The phrase "poorest nation in the western hemisphere" is quite commonly

attributed to Haiti in the media, and here Nadia shows that it is important then for her to learn her Haitian culture just as much as her American culture so that she can further bolster her own identity. Frantz points to a similar sense of hurt because of stereotypes and how promoting culture can counteract that. Frantz says,

We feel that it was extremely important to show the world, to show the Americans that we are not what they thought we are--that we have a culture, that we have a history, we have our religion...the voodoo religion. (Frantz: 7-8)

Here he argues that instead of stereotypes, he wants to focus on showing his United States peers that Haitian culture is more nuanced than is portrayed on the media. Frantz further emphasizes this when he later describes his cultural projects, which “not only serve the Haitian community but also [are] used as a bridge to connect to the other communities” (Frantz: 8). Thus, maintaining culture becomes, in part, a defense against those who would criticize cultural difference and use it to justify forms of persecution.

Sandra and Simon, both employed at the LHCSC, point to the ways culture is integral to their work there and in the other community organizations of which they are a part. Simon, a person with years of experience working with NGOs, describes in a correspondence the importance of culture as follows: “Maintaining my cultural heritage is highly important to me. I am deeply involved in all cultural activities in the Haitian Community.... I always encourage my folks to keep their identity” (Simon: 1). Here, Simon emphasizes that culture is about the maintenance of identity. Not only does he point to his own individual identity but also the collective identity he shares with the people he serves. Lastly, Sandra sees culture and part of the LHCSC’s work in empowering families and connecting Haitians to the larger community. Sandra explains:

Culture and our work goes hand in hand because through culture you can build understanding to other people, you can decrease ignorance and prejudice. Through

culture you can really bridge the gap, the cultural gap between the new immigrants, new to the systems, and other groups that have been established and most importantly, culture can be used as a tool of empowerment....in order for the parents to really to help the children, you know, grow to become responsible citizens, they need their culture, they need their strength and the richness of their culture. (Sandra: 3)

Here, Sandra emphasizes the importance culture has not only connecting outside groups with Haitians but also bringing Haitians of different experiences together.

2.1 Gender in Haitian Culture

Within this dynamic of cultural identity, the issue of gender arose as a source of critique in Haitian culture. Both men and women described prevalent sexism in Haitian culture. However, with this criticism came resolutions from women who were aware of their role as culturally and socially active Haitians and Haitian Americans. Jean and Nadia, who both described themselves as Haitian American, chose not to identify with certain parts of their Haitian culture.

Specifically for Nadia, such criticisms came from Haitian perceptions of women and heteronormativity. Nadia found problematic Haiti's culture of heteronormativity and felt the need to call out such beliefs in cultural spaces such as the church. She also joked about how her values clash with those of culturally traditional Haitian men, and how this would affect her marital decisions in the future. As she says:

There's certain things the Haitian community believes [that], growing up in America, I just don't agree with. Like, let's see, I have to find a good example. LGBT rights. Haitians are extremely homophobic, and growing up in America I have a completely different viewpoint. So when I'm down here, I go to a Haitian church and hearing the sermons I've...heard, there are some times where I'm just like: "you probably shouldn't say that." Or "I don't--I understand where you're coming from, but I grew up differently and I have different ways of thinking." So I think that's something different. In terms of culture, I always make fun of, like, Haitian men and I say that I can't marry a Haitian man. I can marry a Haitian American man but not a Haitian man because of yeah, simply because of the values they hold and how differently they treat women. (Nadia: 2)

As Nadia notes, her own upbringing in the United States has allowed her to see other perspectives on gender and sexual norms. As a result, she feels empowered to critique such forms of discrimination within her community and even make life choices based on her personal social stances. Her willingness to critique her culture shows her ability to not only go against tradition but also take steps in changing her community's culture in how it deals with certain social issues. Such a stance already places Nadia in a position as a social activist since she is willing to change her community's practices through conversations with her cultural peers.

When asked about the LHCSC, which was originally a women's organization, Frantz also went into detail regarding the status of women in Haitian society. He describes the abuse women experience at the hand of their husbands and explains that this is part of the history and culture of Haiti. He ties this to lack of resources for women. He says, "That is part of our history, part of our culture, that the man always step on the lady in Haiti...because of the condition, family conditions, and the environment, there is no work for them" (Frantz: 7). He explains that when families came to the United States, such acts of domestic violence were penalized. According to Frantz, the LHCSC was founded to change this culture and empower women. Thus, sexism in Haitian culture is a distinct concern amongst this group of diasporic social activists.

Still, in spite of these criticisms of the limits Haitian culture places on women, many of the women interviewed were eager to describe their ways to combat such sexism in their personal lives and interactions with others. Some, such as Sandra, use how they expressed their culture in their family as a way to not only combat sexism but to teach the next generation how to recognize and dismantle sexism as well. Such criticism and active work to

undo sexism in their homes and personal lives illuminated an awareness of patriarchy as a system and the ways that integrating their own practices could contribute to the changing of both Haitian culture and society as a whole. Indeed, both Jean and Sandra show how keeping identity in hybrid form works in political ways to shape culture by using the space of the family to combat sexism while still passing down cultural values to the next generation. Indeed, women often lead the way in activist movements—including those whose causes are not specifically focused on gender.

Jean uses such hybridity to change patterns of sexism which influence how Haitian parents treat their children. She describes the clash between her set of values and those of her male family members. She also compares her experience to that of women in the United States by pointing out how Haitian women would not be allowed the same freedoms of education and social interactions found in the United States. She aims to raise her family differently as a result. She says:

I mean there's certain things I don't do. You know what I'm saying? So, to me, taking this from my culture, the way I was raised...and take that and bring that here...to me, a parent that do that should go to jail. But that's me so that's why I said...I have both cultures. (Jean: 5)

She also describes how her own daughter will be raised and allowed to have some the freedoms she herself did not have. In particular, she describes how she plans to let her daughter explore college and socialize since, based on her Haitian upbringing in a male-led household, “my dad was so narrow-minded, he didn't see the big picture” and “My dad wouldn't allow it” (Jean: 5). As she says:

Now I'm saying I would probably allow my daughter to go... [to] college and explore. I would probably allow my daughter to go to big grad and homecoming and prom and all that. My dad, he'll give you a good cuffing before that happens. I will probably allow my daughter to date, you know, to meet the boyfriend at sixteen and

bring him home and we'll talk about it. My dad wouldn't do it. But see, that's different culture. And until this day, it still exists. (Jean: 5)

While Jean describes her personal story here, she continually ties such experience directly to how she sees herself as Haitian and American, and how such a combination informs how she will raise her daughter. In this way, Jean shows her willingness to challenge a society in which women are not given access to resources and advancement. Jean, who still claims her Haitian identity and supports the Haitian community in Haiti and the United States, shows that while she may claim her culture, she has the agency to hold onto the parts which she believes in and that can support her children. Here, culture is not a monolithic entity which requires authenticity or strict adherence to all cultural practices. For Jean, culture is free to be shaped as she desires and in ways which provide freedom for herself and the women in her life. Such a stance on culture is nuanced and, as she desires to pass this down to her daughter, capable of bringing about an even larger change.

Sandra also describes how she wants her children to be aware of sexism and be able to combat it. In describing her sons, she emphasizes how, as she says, she “raised them to be aware and respectful of everybody, of women, and to be open, you know. And my hope is that they will contribute, they will do their part to contribute to the peace that I envision” (Sandra: 7). Sandra also uses her familial space to critique gender norms and instill such practices in her male children. Thus, not only are such critiques of sexism valuable to Sandra’s own work with women at the LHCSC but also in her daily life. Like Jean, passing down such values to her children allows for the possibility of larger changes in both Haitian culture and society’s stance on gender and patriarchy.

Sandra also extends such practices to her interactions with women in her community. She emphasizes how she uses her own personal activities to strengthen the women and their

families with whom she works and interacts. The arts function as one way for Sandra to express the particular experiences of women and thus empower them and their families. As she details:

I also used poetry to empower women and their children--poetry that speaks of the conditions of women, the reality that women face, and that, investing in women, when we invest in women, you know, the family benefits and is happy. (Sandra: 4)

Here, Sandra shows how her own cultural practices created venues for her to spread gendered awareness and better support for families. These concepts are important to Sandra. Indeed, when asked to define activism, among many other things Sandra points to women's rights as a key part of that. She says:

We need safety for women. We need domestic violence to stop. We need domestic violence to be raised to the level of human rights because when the local government is unable or unwilling to protect women, it is a human rights violation. And this is what we call activism. (Sandra: 5)

For Sandra, issues of gender are important not only in her family but her community and in her perspective as a social activist. Thus, culture plays unique roles in contributing to the strengthening and stabilization of women, the next generation in the form of families, and the community.

Nadia, who is part of the next generation, spoke about how her own experience volunteering at the LHCSC helped her not only to grow closer to her Haitian culture but also to the unique plight of women migrants. This experience allowed her to better understand her mother's gendered experience as a Haitian female migrant and thus situate her own experience as a woman within the Haitian community. She says:

As I went through the internship, I realized that the organization helps a lot of women who were in a similar situation to my mom. Like when you first get into the United States, you don't speak English, and if you have kids, it's worse because you have to take them through school, get them to a doctor. You have to do all these things and... I volunteered there because I realized how important it was and I kinda

just wanted to connect. Like when I would come back from my internship, and I would tell my mom about what I did that day, she'd give me random stories like when she first got into the United States and how hard it was to go through school and things like that. So I think it was a good opportunity for me because I learned not just about the Haitian community but more about myself and what my mom went through with that. (Nadia: 3)

Volunteering at the LHCSC helped Nadia to realign her view of Haitian culture and create a more gendered understanding of migration. Although the LHCSC serves migrants of all genders and nationalities, its initial focus was women. This emphasis on women remains and serves to unite Haitian women across generations and empower them. Nadia fostered such an awareness of the distinct experience of women in Haitian culture, and this served to bring her closer to the women in her life while learning to value the Haitian, and in particular Haitian woman, experience. Being in community with women and engaging in social work with them, allows other women to understand their shared experiences and pass them down to their children. Such awareness allows these new learners to have broader understandings of how cultural practices can serve patriarchy, but also, how such practices can be changed.

As can be seen, many interviewees critique the unfairly gendered treatment of women and families in Haitian culture and were willing to be part of the change to this aspect of society. Indeed, the general opinion of culture as both capable of being preserved but also changeable if necessary allows for such criticisms to take place. Thus, the experience of diaspora as hybrid, changeable, and useful for political solidarity and cultural connections across groups allows for political and social change. This is a unique aspect of Haitian diaspora and transnationalism.

With any transnational ethnic group, the maintenance of cultural practices becomes an important way of keeping this connection alive. These practices not only help reinforce personal identity with the country of origin, but also maintain group cohesiveness through

culturally specific gatherings and rituals. For those migrants who consider themselves politically active in the diaspora, culture comes to have many meanings. For some, social activism allows them to see beyond the nation-state—even citing Haiti’s first social revolution as an example of being part of a community beyond borders. For others, transnational maintenance coupled with the experience of diaspora allows one to be aware of the multiple cultures of which one is a part, and thus pick and choose between the two based on social awareness. Some even saw the concept of national allegiance as limiting. Still, cultural identity has value since it becomes the channel through which civic engagement can take place. Cultural solidarity also acts as a protection from marginalization and oppression by dominant groups. Lastly, culture as a dynamic entity can be shared with outsiders to create mutual understanding. Within discussions of culture, and in particular Haitian culture, women’s treatment by Haitian men in the US and Haiti emerged as a key theme. While both men and women deplored the status of Haitian women, many of the women interviewed also described their own ways of fighting back against such marginalization and how they plan to eradicate such gendered treatment. In all, culture became important because of its ability to be preserved and even reshaped not only to reinforce personal identity but to form solidarities within and between groups for social betterment.

3. Activism and the Future

For some interviewees, activism or volunteering was seen as an obligation to the Haitian community. Some saw such activism as intrinsic to Haitian culture and wished for this culture to be passed down to members of the next generation in the Haitian diaspora. Activism emerged as a theme throughout the interviews as a signifier of diasporic identity, an aspect of Haitian culture, and a way to solidify communities and prepare the next

generation for the struggle. Indeed, activism becomes one aspect of Haitian culture which it was felt must be preserved in order to strengthen families and, according to one interviewee, make sure the struggle for establishing the community in Little Haiti is not done in vain. In the interviews, many described their activism as an intrinsic part of their culture and identity, and some, in turn, emphasized their desire to pass these aspects down to the next members of the diaspora.

While certainly an integral part of the Haitian culture, this culture of activism was not always limited to the Haitian community, but seen as an obligation to address any injustices regardless of national origin. James, for example, saw volunteering, or what he called service, as intrinsic to Haitian culture. He pointed to how people in Haiti provide services for each other that in the United States would be considered under the purview of the state. He says that when Haitians such as himself came to the United States, they did not stop providing social programs for their local communities even though it was now provided for by governmental institutions. Instead they shifted to what he calls “assistance.” He says:

That’s something you grew up with, you know....We used to clean the streets...We have to help with the canalization—very simple canalization you know—let the water flow somewhere. You know, we don’t want them to walk in the mud and things. Most of the times we use the streets to play soccer, so we have to keep it clean...And when we came here, there was a different way to provide those type of services. It was no longer the street to clean. No longer someone to take to the hospital because emergency services were made available to anyone, but we had a different type of service: assistance....So that’s why I volunteer; you call it volunteer, I call it service. (James: 2)

In a sense, the environment of Haiti with its oppressive regimes and lack of social support by the state allowed community-directed and localized service to grow. As James connects these practices strongly to culture in Haiti, they become transferrable to the diaspora, and thus don’t stop when migrants cross borders. Indeed, according to James, to grow up in Haiti

is to already be a volunteer. He points out the diasporic and global implications of this outlook when he says:

So we are already volunteers....We don't see it as volunteering; we see it as service to your country, service to your community. And we saw it as where you stand is your community. It doesn't matter the name of the country because when you look, there's no line that tells you exactly where you enter in....We place the signs ourselves, so, to us it's not being a volunteer, it's only service to our community. (James: 1)

Thus, James points to how diasporic communities can see activism as part of their diasporic culture. Wherever one is, community can grow, and with that, one's obligation to support that community. Indeed, Simon, who works with clients at the LHCSC on a regular basis points to how both he and his clients feel the desire to volunteer and serve where they are. Simon says of his former clients: "they found interesting the job we have been doing here [so] they thought necessary to come back and help in return" (Simon: 1). He also points to how he has carried the culture of service in Haiti with him to the United States when he says: "It's really amazing for me to continue to serve the same kind of people I used to serve when I was in Haiti" (Simon: 2). Thus, activist movements can take on both national and global characteristics since how one sees community can encompass not only one's ethnic community both locally and globally but also individuals outside of one's ethnic group in similar struggle.

A number of interviewees described their service in the Haitian community as a second job or other Haitian community leaders as part of a mutual network of social support. Indeed, many see attending to the needs of their fellow Haitian leaders and community members as an obligation to which they very strongly adhere. Emmanuel, for example, describes his daily work as part his professional employment but at the same time his obligation to his community. He says: "when I introduce myself in public, I say my day

job...help me pay the bill[s], but I moonlight in the evening for my community”

(Emmanuel: 7). James also describes his community work as a second job. He says of his work in the past: “even though I had my job, I still find time to be very much productive in my community. I like to participate.” (James: 1). Currently, James sees his responsibility to the LHCSC as important. As he informs me, “My services... [are] very easy: no commitment, no contract--just do it. You know, I don’t need to be paid. They know that I am available at any time, and, whenever they call, I respond” (James: 3). Frantz also sees his work with other community leaders at the LHCSC as important, even saying of one peer, in this case, Sandra: “We work very close together. Whatever she’s doing, I know, whatever she’s planning to do, we are part of the same organizations and we work together because we have the same vision, you know?” (Frantz: 7). Jean describes how grants and grant requirements pushed non-profit organizations within the community to work specifically with the Haitian community and that this is the main reason why such organizations worked with Haitians. As she says,

I don’t think anybody cares really about the community. I think they only care about their grants--I mean meeting their grant requirements....There were times where situations would arise...where....they will take it [to] heart because they felt that that’s home...but that’s why I say sometimes it’s yes, sometimes was no--to me.
(Jean: 4)

However, she says that some organizations will work together to address the multiple needs of families by coordinating resources. As she tells it,

I mean, they will go the extra mile, they will call certain offices. For example, if my office handles the kids, they’ll call my office in to say, “listen I have this case here and I have this child that today got into a fight and he is suspended for ten days. Okay, what are the workshops that you have for the next two weeks? Can they be involved in the program for the next two weeks?” So just to give the parents something to show the parents that we are actually a community that cares. We are actually an organization that wants to help you with your kids. (Jean: 4)

Lastly, Nadia views volunteering as a way to get more in touch with her Haitian culture, and describes a sense of self- and community empowerment by focusing her time on volunteering with the Haitian community and perhaps even her Black diasporic community:

If you don't know your culture, you get the stereotype version of your culture and then you don't learn to, like, love it and appreciate it... You know, your culture kinda keeps you grounded. Because when you hear all of these negative stereotypes--not just about being Haitian, being Black in America, in general--you need something to keep you grounded, you need something to have pride in and I think that's why it's important to like volunteer...and just stay in touch with who you are, who your family are and from and sacrificed. (Nadia: 5)

Thus, for many interviewees, volunteering or providing services to the Haitian community is motivated by personal, social, and sometimes financial reasons. In spite of these varied reasons, a sense of community still emerges as these local leaders state the importance of always making themselves available to their peers in other community projects or programs. Being available, coordinating services across organizations, and seeing volunteering as a symbolic way to stay connected are just a few of the ways that social activism forms strong ties across the Haitian diaspora both materially and culturally.

Still, such activism does not only unite Haitian networks but, rather, provides avenues to build inter-ethnic coalitions or empathize with the plights of other marginalized groups. A number of interviewees see their volunteerism and work ethic as globally-oriented, and many strongly emphasize that their volunteer work is not limited to the Haitian community. Patricia, for example, firmly emphasizes that: "I don't limit myself to the Haitian community" and then explains, "I mean, the Haitian community is important to me but I live in a larger community that I also care about" (Patricia: 4). Earlier in the interview, she gave me her personal philosophy and firmly planted it in a global perspective. She says, "My philosophy is I can make the world, I mean... if I can participate in making the world a

better place for people to achieve their potential, then it becomes... a better place for myself as well” (Patricia: 1). Here, Patricia sees her neighbors as not only her Haitian peers but others who are in need. Similarly, Sandra and Frantz maintain a more global perspective even as they serve mostly Haitian populations. They see the plight of Haitian refugees as similar to other ethnic groups who flee their countries for better prospects elsewhere. Sandra tells me:

Haitians do not ask—most people, most immigrants—they do not ask a lot. All they need: the possibility to work and to have access to the basic things that we enjoy here in America....However, I have been to Jamaica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela...they’re looking for the same thing. They’re looking for security, safety for their families. (Sandra: 6)

Frantz compares the plight of Haitian refugees to escape Jean Claude Duvalier’s regime to current events in South and Central America. He says:

Most of those Haitians that came to the United States in the 80s they called them boat people....They came to flee the country because of political aggression, because of economic situations. For them there is political aggression...people cannot find work and the government is after you for anything and everything. In order to save your life and the life of your family, you know, you go into hiding or at a certain point you have to leave because they will be after you, looking to kill you. You know it’s the same situation that’s happening in other countries. Now it is in Nicaragua, Honduras and you see those people bringing their children, holding them, leaving the children to go by themselves.That’s exactly more or less that’s the same thing happening in Haiti in the 80s. (Frantz: 2)

Here, both Frantz and Sandra point to the similar experiences not only with migrants but political refugees from other countries. Where in the United States, the debate exists over who counts as a migrant or refugee, Frantz and Sandra seek ways to find similarities and thus build empathy with fellow migrants in a climate where ethnic and political affinity often serve to distance such groups away from each other. Here, not only do politically active members of the Haitian diaspora recognize their similarities to other migrants and refugees, but for some, their perspective on social activism becomes more broadened as they

recognize that oppression works across racial and national lines. Such a view allows for the possibility of political alliances across cultures united by shared oppression.

When part of the diasporic community, Haitians balance their concerns for their home country of Haiti and the state of Haitians living alongside them in the United States. From the interviews, diasporic Haitians expressed their concern for the state of relations between the United States and Haiti, local politics in Haiti, and policies in the United States which affected their own local communities. Such concern turns into social criticism, awareness, and action. Many of the Haitian community leaders interviewed emphasized the importance of galvanizing their communities into more social awareness and increased political activity so that they could influence policies related to Haitian migrants and migrants in general. For example, Simon explains:

I think the more you're involved in the political arena the more you can defend your rights. I also encourage our Haitian folks to run for some political positions so we can influence some decisions in favor of the Haitian community and the immigrant community at large. I have participated in several electoral campaigns at different levels (federal, state and local). (Simon: 2)

Emmanuel, who works as an advocate, defines his role as a liaison between the Haitian community and politicians and sees his work as important to his community both in the United States and in Haiti. Of his work he says:

It gives you some exposure to the powers that be, to be a good influence on them, to make a point, to make a point in terms of the, how...you relate what you are hearing from the ground to the super higher up who don't want to do the nitty gritty work at the grassroots level. The nitty gritty work is left to the advocates, to the activist to the, be in contact with their base so that when you are called upon you can reiterate what the ground is thinking, and go ahead. On that aspect, we have become what you call informal advisors for many particular politicians, senators, governors and sometimes even presidents. (Emmanuel: 8)

Others add that their efforts in the United States were only the first part of their work. Again, Simon, for example, states that he hopes to return to Haiti using the tools he has used in the

United States in order to run for political office in Haiti in the future. He says, “I volunteer here not only to acquire the best practices not only to serve me in the future for sharing with the Haitian community in the U.S. but also when I am back to Haiti” (Simon: 1). Thus, Haitian diaspora who remain politically active are “people with their feet planted in both worlds” (Danticat 2001: xv).¹⁶ Being in the diaspora creates a more global, socially conscious perspective as one’s concerns for family and communities can cross borders. These transnational concerns place the diaspora in a necessary position of maintaining social awareness and at times pursuing social action as local and foreign policies suddenly begin to directly affect families, communities, and entire nations to which members of the diaspora typically long to return.

A number of interviews expressed their own critiques of how outside policies have affected the political and economic stability of Haiti. For example, James critiques foreign interventions:

You are degrading and defacing the country and you blame it on the people of the country.... The country did not go to Haiti; the country sent people to Haiti, and perhaps the people you sent to Haiti were the most corrupt ones. (James: 8)

For James, his critique is not against nations per se, but against those foreign policymakers who are already corrupt and bring harm to the people in Haiti. Emmanuel also critiques foreign intervention, but he ties his critique to a much deeper cultural and historical narrative of slavery and occupation. For Emmanuel, Haiti’s revolutionary history makes the experience of occupation painful and reminiscent of what their ancestors fought to be free from at the start of the nation’s history.

¹⁶ Quote taken from the late Haitian journalist Jean Dominic. Dominic was a politically active Haitian radio host who went briefly into exile in the United States as a result of his political activity. He was assassinated at his radio station in Haiti in 2000.

We have seen that in 19[9]4¹⁷ there was the first invasion of the US to occupy the country then they left and came back again in 2004. From 2004 up to today the country is still under foreign occupation. And it is something that is very painful for many people. Knowing their sacrifice, knowing the sacrifices that was made by Haitian slaves or former slaves during the 19th and in the 18th century. It is basically anathema. It is anathema in the sense that the desire—the deep desire—of the white man to come back to Haiti and take it over...becomes the reality, and now we see that today my generation and others, we are basically living in shame for giving away that land to the white man because...in the national context of the west, Haiti played a strategy, a role, in the form of ending slavery in a time where slavery was the economic model of the day. It has been what you call the west as taking action to create a lot of barriers that would impact the social, economic, and political development of Haiti. (Emmanuel: 3)

Here, Emmanuel ties social activism and injustice to the history and formation of Haiti and Haitian culture. In this way, native Haitians and diasporic Haitians already hold onto a sense of social justice and activism in their culture and history. Such cultural aspects of activism transfer to Haitians living abroad in the United States. Indeed, many interviewees describe how they fostered such a culture of activism in the United States.

In particular, Sandra had much to say on the importance of social activism to supporting and sustaining the Haitian community in the United States. Her words speak volumes about the role communal involvement in politics helps to sustain such marginalized communities as that of Haitian migrants working to survive in the United States. It is fruitful to quote her at length. Here, she describes the goal of the LHCSC to be not only community services but also political empowerment. She says:

My philosophy has always been not to really give, you know, provide but most importantly, to really give the tools, to provide the tools for families so that they can contribute to their own empowerment and transformation and this is why in Miami we are unique in the sense that we provide quality services but we also get the clients engaged. We organize them locally, state-wide, and nationally to make sure that they

¹⁷ The first invasion of Haiti by the United States occurred from 1915-1934. The second came in 1994 when United States forces reinstated President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to finish his term. In 2004, the US forces returned after the removal of Aristide from office via coup d'état. United States forces remain and have been expanded with the addition of United Nations forces in an ongoing controversial occupation.

can have, not only that they strengthen their voices, but that their voices are being heard. (Sandra: 2)

Indeed, Sandra eloquently explained the important role communal activism played in influencing policies:

Basically, the activism is really to help clients take charge of their lives and take charge of their community...Because, historically we know that politicians really cannot solve peoples' problems....They cannot organize and empower communities. So it is important for us to get our clients engaged to give them the tools to organize themselves and make their voices heard to bring positive changes, policy changes. Because it is not about elected officials. If it were up to elected officials, then, you know, nothing will be changed! ...Oftentimes you don't see them until the next election. That's why it is so important in order to impact change—that you arm those who live in their communities so that they understand the issues. You bring them together. You share the issues with them. They understand the issues. They understand why this came about, why are they paying, you know, \$1000 dollars for a two bedroom, so-called, affordable housing. Why? What can they do to impact change? How can they use their voices collectively so that it gets stronger to impact positive change? So that's...political activism? Yes. We organize people to bring them to county government so that they can speak. They can talk about what is going on in their lives, what they are going through and we have done that. We take them to Washington D.C. We bring them to the halls of Congress....We organize them in a way where they can be their own spokespersons because that's the only way things will change....And this is what we call activism. We empower our people to understand their reality and then if changes, you know, changes are necessary, they know that it is up to them to organize and bring about change in the policies, in the politics, and so forth. (Sandra: 4-5)

Sandra clearly states the importance of communal involvement in politics as it allows local citizens to be critical of policies which affect them. Indeed, Sandra draws from what Emmanuel points out is part of Haiti's history of local revolution to highlight the ways individuals can more directly influence politics when politicians sometimes do not have the best interests of the people in mind. Such a tradition of community involvement is highlighted in Sandra and Emmanuel's words and points to the importance of political activism to diasporic communities, and in particular, the Haitian diaspora.

Social activism can mean many things. It can mean mass movements, volunteering, advocating, or service. These definitions arose in the interviews of Haitian diaspora living in Miami. For many of this group, activism is defined as an obligation not only to the Haitian community but also to the global population, the majority of whom are struggling under similar circumstances to Haitians and Haitian migrants. Such a comparison arises amongst these volunteers who see their work as contributing to the advancement of the global community in addition to the Haitian and Haitian diasporic group in the United States.

Experiencing the movement across borders and the hybrid nature of identity inherent in diaspora allows such people to understand how social forces create situations for migration not only for themselves but others. Such understandings create possibilities for coalitions amongst groups in the Black Atlantic and beyond. These interactions indeed take place, but they are at times complicated by the ways in which migrants are racially segregated and thus given differential access to resources. However, such stratification has not stopped alliances from forming in the wake of common crises. Based on the interviews, social activism is not limited to national obligations, although such ties do exist. Indeed, participation in social activism allowed the Haitian diaspora to see the larger, historical, economic forces at play which marginalized their community and nation as well as others.

3.1 The Next Generation

While the importance of passing down cultural traditions and the spirit of activism was an important project for interviewees, a number of the older generation expressed concern with the gap between their peers and those born and raised in the United States. Sandra, who in another section affirmed cultural maintenance as key to keeping families

together, also points to how the passing down of cultural traditions is a moral imperative and helps direct children who are navigating the cultures of both Haiti and the United States:

The children, as soon as they come here, they try to adopt—and it's normal, they want to be accepted...you know, they want to make friends and oftentimes they get engaged in things that they shouldn't. However, if they understand...their history, their culture, [and] where they come from, then they know that yes, I will adopt this but also I have something important that I can embrace. (Sandra: 4)

Here, Sandra points to a kind of competition between two cultures where Haitian American children may be drawn to one or the other. Still, Sandra accepts that the next generation will adopt newer cultural models; however, she prioritizes the relative importance of Haitian culture as a way to keep young Haitian Americans responsible for their social development.

Emmanuel also points to differences between his and the next generations as well as the importance of remembering Haitian history and culture. For him, that important history is not just Haitian culture but also the history of Haitian migrants in Miami and the United States. As he says,

What I like to share with people is the discrepancies between the community built in blood. Many Haitian activists have died...in terms of being shot by other groups. And all those things have to do with politics. And there are...times Haitians from the generation would come trying to—basically, they're trying to create their own space under the sun. And you see people like me and others who have to tell them: "this is not a savannah, it took time. It took a lot of sacrifice to build this space, this community here, so you cannot just come and then thinking that overnight you can take control. There is a process of accommodation. (Emmanuel: 6)

Emmanuel's concern lies in the respecting of those who came before and created the community for the next generation. However, Emmanuel points to why this respect is important in transmitting a culture of social activism when he continues:

Basically you see that our young ones, [didn't need to know the sacrifice the older generation had to make]. We need to share the differences with them...in order to collaborate instead of working against each other...I really would like the younger generation to get involved so that I can share my knowledge, my experience with them so that we don't start from scratch because it is very, very painful to start from

scratch and a lot of things that we achieve here is because we fought for it.
(Emmanuel: 6)

For Emmanuel, keeping that politically active history alive allows for solidarity across generational divides and maintains the practice of social activism or, “getting involved.” For Emmanuel, history becomes a way of connecting generations and fostering political alliances. To forget that history creates rifts across generations and, for Emmanuel, potentially allows for a culture of political activism to die out.

Political activism was an important topic for many interviewees concerned with the next generation. Many saw the next generation’s involvement in political and legal affairs either through running for political office or working in the legal sector as valuable since such services remain useful for strengthening the marginalized community in the eyes of policymakers and the state. Patricia, for example, observed that since she arrived in the United States, there have been an increasing number of Haitian political candidates and many of them come from the second generation. As she says:

In North Miami, there are a lot of Haitian candidates, Haitian Americans, in front positions commissioners...and the second generation, there are quite a few that went to law school and [are] understanding the law and applying them to better their communities. I think Haitians are more involved than, you know, when I just got here ...when they were new here and they didn’t have all that at home. They become more involved in life. (Patricia: 3)

Here, Patricia points to how the circumstances of living within the diaspora as a refugee and notably, as the child of refugees, contribute to increasing one’s level of political engagement. She also notes that such engagement works both ways since it spreads to the older generation who see this youth activism and become more aware. As she says, “Being that they are more involved, the parents themselves, I think, have a better understanding, the people that came” (Patricia: 3). As Patricia notes, Haitians are becoming more involved and

this active engagement has come primarily from the next generation, but has also spread to parents who become more socially aware as a result of their children's participation in politics.

Frantz spoke at length about the potential of the next generation. Indeed, he expressed hope and excitement for the way that the next generation was succeeding professionally in the United States, and he had real hope for the future of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. At one point, he says,

Now you see how...30, 40 years later, you know, we are very strong politically--I hope we don't lose the momentum--but we are very strong! You know? And also if you do some research and you check, the Haitian families, you will see almost every single family there is...a young person, young professional coming up! (Frantz: 5)

Frantz shows his optimism for the growing political activism of the Haitian diaspora, but he also betrays concern about the longevity of such progress. Like Emmanuel, he seems to place faith in the next generation to keep a culture of political activity alive and thriving.

Frantz spoke about the importance of supporting the young people and encouraging their progress. He spoke highly of the younger generation and listed some of the ways young Haitians receive support. In addition to speaking with pride about his own family, he says,

Those kids they are so bright, you know. They got scholarships....There is a movementthat is helping...the young people...get the GEDs...or if they need scholarship, give them scholarship, you know, to go ahead, to persevere. You know! So we are moving very fast. (Frantz: 5)

Again, Frantz expresses optimism about the next generation and points to ways that they can receive support through GED programs and scholarships. For Frantz, who came to Miami specifically to support Haitian refugees arriving by boat in the 1980s, the next generation becomes a source of hope and optimism in terms of the continuing success of the specifically Haitian community. For Frantz both professional and political involvement

remain key to the continuation and success of the Haitian diasporic community in the United States.

However, within that optimism of professional and political advancement are growing class differences between the first generation and the next generations. Frantz expressed concern with Haitian Americans who, having grown up in Little Haiti, go to school and become professionals, but ultimately leave Little Haiti as they advance in status.

As he says,

The second and the third generation is very, very bright, but the only thing is the second generation, they don't return to Little Haiti. That's...cause...Little Haiti is being depleted...you know that the population we had in the 80s and 90s is fading out because the first generation is getting old just like me, they're tired, they are retiring, and the kids! When they finish their university or their college, you know, they're scattered all over the place. They don't return here because first of all it's where you find the drug people, second of all is where you're married, where your husband or wife wants to take you, you know, and also this area is so poor...the young person with the master's degree is not coming here to sit here and look at you! [chuckles] You see what I mean? So this is creating that phenomenon called gentrification, you know? It's depleting slowly but surely. (Frantz: 6)

Thus, while Frantz is eager to praise the next generation for being successful, he also points to how such success leads to widening class differences between generations. Similarly, James also laments the bleeding out of the Haitian American diaspora from Little Haiti as it is changing the face of the community. He says,

People [who] used to live in Little Haiti had to move out, move on...They raise their children, they go to college, and when they look back that's where one of their friends get shot, the cockroaches, there's no way I'm going back to this neighborhood because of my family history. The other thing is after college I got a good job, I can afford living somewhere else. So they move to another place. Well...we see people are leaving the community. Now you have the name of Little Haiti, but it's not the same. You don't see it, even though some of us are trying to keep the name but people are moving away from what used to be Little Haiti. (James: 6-7)

Little Haiti, the site where Haitian refugees initially established their community in Florida, is gradually decreasing, and, as the next generations continue to succeed, this community may disappear. While Frantz shows concern for the changing face of Little Haiti, he later emphasizes the importance of the next generation using their success in the United States to help those seemingly left behind. He continues,

So that means that we have to find ways and means to reverse it. We have to find ways and means to get these people interested in the area....we have to develop this area so that we can attract them--somehow! You see what I mean? The attraction that is what is important. If they come what are they going to find? Why do they have to come? Do they have to come just to visit? No! They have to come to invest, you know, and we have to create the environment for them. (Frantz: 6)

Here, Frantz indicates a desire for the next generation to give back to the community which supported them. This recalls Emmanuel's assertion that the Haitian diaspora is a "community built in blood" and must be remembered as such. However, both Emmanuel and Frantz emphasize the importance of working together across generations to support the Haitian diasporic community as a whole. Just as Emmanuel desires a collaboration between his and the younger generations, Frantz here insists that the community of Little Haiti has a responsibility to entice next generation Haitian professionals to invest in the community. As he argues, an environment has to be created in order for them to return and maintain the Little Haiti community. Like Sandra, Frantz wants these next generation Haitians to find value in their culture and in their community.

For the interviewees, cultural solidarity and social activism remained an important part of maintaining the Haitian diaspora. With this comes the importance of passing down traditions of culture and social awareness to the next generation. A number of interviewees saw their work as important not only for their community but also those who came after. Within LHCSC, families and children are an important population to the organization and

they provide many forms of support to mothers and their families. Both women and men interviewed brought up the importance of passing down similar values to the next generation. For them, ensuring familial solidarity and cultural continuity across generations allowed their diasporic community to continue to thrive while displaced on United States soil. Indeed, many expressed pride at the ways the next generation were already getting involved in the Haitian community either through political service or overall professional achievement. However, within that narrative of success was the fear of the future generations leaving behind their communities as they advance in class status. Some interviewees were enthusiastic about theirs and other children's success, but expressed concern with how their moving beyond the community of Little Haiti or even establishing their own separate communities may work to the detriment of those still economically and politically vulnerable in the community. As a result, three interviewees, Emmanuel, Frantz, and Patricia, emphasized ways that the generations could work together to better their community as whole. For these interviewees, intergenerational solidarity was key to the continuing of Haitian culture and political strength within the community.

CONCLUSION

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. (Hall 1990: 225)

Culture is dynamic and useful as a tool of empowerment and solidarity. Within the Haitian diaspora there exists an ambivalent longing for the homeland since transnational connections help maintain allegiances to Haiti and, yet, living within the diaspora also works to shape one’s identity into a more hybrid form incorporating the home country and place of residence. Studying transnationalism within the context of diaspora uncovers these complex relationships and contradictions, and demonstrates the ways migratory movement, marginalization within the country of residence, and the consequent reliance on transnational ties work to reshape cultures. This reshaping, in turn, fashions modes of political awareness and activism within communities. To see oneself as part of the diaspora necessitates an active engagement and reconceptualization of one’s national identity.

Longing for the homeland of the past, or how one conceives of its future, can be assuaged by participating in forms of activism that promote cultural solidarity and the possibility of return. In these interviews the intricacies of maintaining transnational connections while forging hybrid identities were explored through the lens of political activism. For these interviewees, political activism became one way of engaging with the established diasporic community, preserving the culture of diaspora for the next generations, and supporting those still living in the homeland. Political activism thus becomes one medium not only for building and maintaining transnational connections but also for

constantly challenging one's culture and refashioning one's identity within the diaspora, as both Jean and Sandra exemplified through their gendered critique of Haitian culture and desire to pass down more feminist views to their children.

Culture serves many purposes for the politically active Haitian diaspora. It can be used as protection against discrimination in the public eye, and a medium through which one can dispel ignorance and educate non-Haitians. Culture can also be hybrid and changing, which allows it to be vulnerable to criticism and reassessment. In particular, Haitian culture's traditional dealings with gender, especially women, became a site of criticism that alienated women in the culture and community. As one can see, culture becomes important to social activism as it galvanizes people into active community and becomes an open space for social critiques of structures of power both in the United States and in Haiti. Based on my interviews, cultural and political consciousness were in "constant transformation" in ways that reinforced each other for the local benefit of families, members of the Haitian diasporic community, and even transnationally for those still living in Haiti. Culture then is an important part of the socially active diaspora because it is key to the maintenance of Haitian diasporic identity and positive social activity.

This diasporic culture also works to empower marginalized groups at the individual, familial, and local level. Much like many of the respondents described, culture is not only about debates on authenticity and inclusivity of ethnic groups as James suggested. Rather, it helps to bolster an ethnic group who has been defined by stereotypes which serve to ostracize and malign them. As Frantz emphasized and Nadia explained, cultural maintenance boosts their community pride and allows them the opportunity to share their unique customs with others who may only have a generalized view of Haitians. Preserving

culture can boost those who are marginalized, and sharing cultures builds bridges between the marginalized and those ignorant of the culture. Because culture becomes a tool of empowerment which can be critiqued and reshaped, it helps to create more dynamic identities that ultimately include rather than excludes people because of difference. As Patricia and James pointed out, their Haitian community is important, but their history of struggle has encouraged them to broaden their scope of who can be included in that group and thus who they serve as volunteers or advocates. Hall (1990) suggests that diasporic cultural identities never remain static. This point is clear in this study as identities are constantly renegotiated and rarely remain static. In addition, those who hold these identities also work to form local and transnational cultural communities.

Globalization has pushed migrants across national borders as they search for better wages and a chance at a better life. Whether enticed by the possibility of better work programs or encouraged by migrant networks in other countries, those who migrate find new places to reside, but maintain their national cultures. Thus, nations can culturally spread across borders as migrants move to work abroad to sustain their families struggling to survive without state support and protection. This has also been the case with Haiti.

Michel Laguerre's description of Haitians as diasporic citizens becomes useful for talking about those who move abroad but remain tied to Haiti (1998: 190). The term diaspora is also helpful as it points to this longing for home, and the term "citizenship" allows for a steadfast political connection. It is thus possible to see that the concept of nation becomes heightened for Haitian migrants who, already imbued with a cultural sense of national resistance, may find that being away from the physical homeland creates a longing for and alliance with this former community. Since the Haitian nation remains a site of

politicized identity and resistance, such conceptions may transfer to Haitians living abroad within the diaspora as part of the culture of the Haitian diaspora.

As the culture of diaspora continues to be a part of Haitian life, transnationalism as a concept shifts in intriguing ways. Local populations, and in particular women, who are made vulnerable as a consequence of globalization and its concomitant neoliberal restructuring will seek better fortunes elsewhere and become migrants who maintain transnational ties. Such a trend initiates the migration of labor and, through the process of flexible accumulation, fills the need of global capitalism for flexible labor pools.

The traditional concept of the nation as one limited by physical borders will necessarily have to change. Diasporic conceptions of identity may become the norm as borders are blurred and people find cultural affinities outside the nation of origin to be more viable than those tied to physical nations. Future generations of migrants then become the new diasporic fruit of these movements across borders and shifting conceptions of nationhood.

More broadly, with increasing globalization of political and economic spheres, diaspora becomes useful as a political term by allowing for an identity shaped around resistance to a capitalist state which has increasingly become more transnationalized and its elite abandons the people residing within its physical locale. Diaspora reframed as an “empty signifier” can develop into a collective challenge against those who would use nationalism and migration as a tool to silence and exploit workers and families (Laclau 2007). The Haitian diaspora provides a space where a politicized sense of nation can exist outside the nation’s boundaries, and still mobilize against the nation-state. While the people of Haiti have experienced multiple regime changes, violent political overthrows, and

domination from both within and outside the nation-state, such shifts have not stopped them from conducting mass protests and expressing their discontent with the state, while living outside Haiti, by gathering and representing themselves as the nation of Haiti. Such a clash between cultural nation and the state makes Haiti a unique case within more common understandings of the hegemonic nation-state that dominates its people through consent and coercion (Trouillot 1990).

Globalization does not serve the working-class citizens of the nation-state who, abandoned by the state in accordance with neoliberal structural adjustment policies, learn to survive on their own as their surplus labor profits the capitalist upper-class. Such a widening gap between the national working-class and the transnational, global-class (or TCC) has forced many people to become transnational themselves as migrant laborers in order to survive and support family in the homeland. Those migrants who find themselves unable to return home because of political or economic instability may consider themselves as a diaspora in ways similar to those who migrate for jobs to support families. Indeed, alternative economies and diasporic communities fueled by nationalism exist within global cities and transnational social groups such as Haitians and Cubans in Miami or Dominican transnational villagers in New York (Levitt 2001; Stepick 1989). Connections between countries become more easily culturally, politically, and economically transnational, as do the routes between nations that connect laborers to work overseas, who also maintain transnational families. As a result, diasporas develop made up of those who, finding better economic opportunity or safety from political violence elsewhere decide to stay abroad while remaining actively engaged with the homeland. Forms of resistance against global

capitalism may coalesce into larger diasporas united by their status of mobility and vulnerability.

At the same time, this diasporic longing also has room for hybridity. As mentioned earlier, interviewees spoke of their own identification as Haitians, but were still willing to criticize government policies. In addition, some interviewees took on multiple identities in ways that intersected with nationality, race, and gender. Such fluid identities allowed them to step outside of these categories and criticize them. Perhaps such hybridity marks a turn in typical conceptions of diaspora and transnationalism. Transnationalism implies an allegiance between two countries, and, as mentioned in the literature review, this transnationalism can be co-opted by the state to exploit its own people into funding the development of their country without much state support through remittances. Cultures of transnationalism can certainly be used as a form of resistance, but those who would do so need to be aware of the potential ways transnational capitalists can make use of resistance movements for different ends. Diaspora, however, when viewed as a hybrid identity, emerged in this study as a critical stance toward conceptions of nationhood and identity.

It is evident more work can be done which explores how transnationalism and diasporic consciousness work together in fostering political and cultural consciousness. Future work could also focus on how diaspora as a sense of community and political awareness can be used to challenge the oppression of the nation-state as I have suggested here. As many theorists have cautioned, globalization has not made the nation-state decrease in importance, but has instead shifted, and indeed stretched its reach via transnationalism and deterritorialization. Shifting to a more critical, hybrid form of diaspora has, as one can

see, provided new spaces for social criticism of the nation-state and both local and global policies.

To see oneself as diasporic is to admit that the old homeland is perhaps unreachable, but that a new world is possible.

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